

# **The Smiling, Proud Wanderer**

**Jin Yong**

# Table of Contents

## The Smiling, Proud Wanderer: Volume 1

Ebook Compiler's Note

Contents

Chapter 1: Massacre

Chapter 2: Eavesdropping

Chapter 3: Rescue

Chapter 4: Seat-Fighting

Chapter 5: Healing

Chapter 6: Hand-Washing

Chapter 7: Music Score

Chapter 8: Meditation

Chapter 9: Invitation

Chapter 10: Sword Training

Notes

## The Smiling, Proud Wanderer: Volume 2

Contents

Chapter 10: Sword Training

Chapter 11: Energy Streams

Chapter 12: Assassins

Chapter 13: Learning Music

Chapter 14: Wine Cups

Chapter 15: Medicine

Chapter 16: Gaining Blood

Chapter 17: In Love

Chapter 18: Collaboration

Chapter 19: The Wager

Chapter 20: Imprisonment

Notes

## The Smiling, Proud Wanderer: Volume 3

Contents

Chapter 21: Life in Prison

Chapter 22: Out of Trouble

Chapter 23: Ambush  
Chapter 24: Injustice  
Chapter 25: Information  
Chapter 26: Besieging the Temple  
Chapter 27: Three Fights  
Chapter 28: Accumulation of Snow  
Chapter 29: Headmaster  
Chapter 30: Secret Meeting  
Notes

## The Smiling, Proud Wanderer: Volume 4

### Contents

Chapter 31: Embroidering  
Chapter 32: School Merger  
Chapter 33: Sword Fight  
Chapter 34: Snatching the Leadership  
Chapter 35: Vengeance  
Chapter 36: Grief  
Chapter 37: Forcing Marriage  
Chapter 38: Annihilation  
Chapter 39: No Treaty  
Chapter 40: Harmony  
Notes

**The Smiling,  
Proud  
Wanderer:  
Volume 1**

**Jin Yong**



# **The Smiling, Proud Wanderer**

(**笑傲江湖** / **Xiào Ào Jiānghú**)

## **Volume 1**

**by**

**Jin Yong**

### **Translators:**

Lanny Lin

Pokit

Bliss

### **Editor:**

HHaung

## **Ebook Compiler's note.**

This was originally translated by and posted online by

- Lanny Lin (<http://www.lannyland.com>, <http://blog.lannyland.com>) (Chapters 1 to 21)
- Pokit (<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/17771-Smiling-Proud-Wanderer-Unabridged>) (Chapters 22 to 40)
- Bliss (Chapters 30,31)
- Editor: HHaung

I compiled it as part of an ongoing effort to create a repository of the online fan translations of wuxia fiction in a more convenient format for offline reading.

Unfortunately there does not appear to a large commercial market for English wuxia translations, so we are beholden to by Lanny, Pokit and others for their efforts to bring the work of Jin Yong, Gu Long et al to an English speaking audience.

Additionally, I would note that the work involved goes far beyond just translation.

Chinese cannot simply be directly translated to English, so am grateful for the notes explaining idioms in addition to notes on geography, culture and historical context.

I have left the translations as I found them with the following caveats.

- I added the pictures and chapter descriptions from Lanny's website
- I received chapters 1 to 21 in a MS Word document from Lanny which included footnotes, whereas I assembled Chapters 22 onwards from the online version. The online version used inline notation, but I changed the inline explanations to footnotes for consistency's sake.

## **Other Translations**

We have a repository of some of the existing online translations, including links and many downloads in eBook format.

<http://wuxiatranslations.wikispaces.com>

There is also a sister site, also with downloads but more emphasis on original translations and forum discussions.

<http://wuxiasociety.com>

Other good sources for translations are

<http://www.lannyland.com>

<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/forumdisplay.php/29-Wuxia-Translations>

<http://xiaoshuo.genreverse.com>

[http://haddjo.freehostia.com/joomla\\_1.5.3/index.php](http://haddjo.freehostia.com/joomla_1.5.3/index.php)

<http://mywuxia.com>

# Contents

[Chapter 1: Massacre](#)

[Chapter 2: Eavesdropping](#)

[Chapter 3: Rescue](#)

[Chapter 4: Seat-Fighting](#)

[Chapter 5: Healing](#)

[Chapter 6: Hand-Washing](#)

[Chapter 7: Music Score](#)

[Chapter 8: Meditation](#)

[Chapter 9: Invitation](#)

[Chapter 10: Sword Training](#)

# **Chapter 1: Massacre**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The young man smiled and cracked his whip in the air cockily. Answering the command, the white horse neighed happily and dashed along the stone slab road. "Escort Shi," one of the guards yelled out, "how about bringing back a wild boar, so we can all have a feast!"**

Spring was always a relaxing time of the year. As the breeze gently brushed the willow trees and wild flowers, it filled the air of the southland with a pleasant scent of the season.

The West Gate Boulevard of Fuzhou<sup>1</sup> was a stone slab road that extended all the way to the west gate of the town. A huge mansion stood south of the street, in front of which a tall flagpole stood on either side of the entrance. The flagpoles were about twenty feet tall, each with a huge green banner streaming in the wind. The banner on the left was embroidered in yellow silk, bearing the image of a majestic lion. As the banner fluttered back and forth in the wind, the lion seemed as though it had come alive and was about to jump down at any moment. Just above the lion's head was a pair of bats, embroidered in black silk; they appeared to be flapping their wings in the air. The banner on the right bore four huge characters in black that read "Fortune Prestige Escort House," all written in a bold, vigorous hand.

The mansion itself had a large vermilion gate with teacup-sized copper studs which sparkled in the bright sunlight. Above the gate, the same "Fortune Prestige Escort House" characters were inscribed in gold lacquer on a huge sign with the word "Headquarters" engraved in smaller print just below. Beyond the gate were two rows of benches bordering a path, and sitting upon those benches were eight guards in house uniforms, their faces animated with excitement.

Sounds of hoof beats came from the backyard of the court. All eight guards sprang up and rushed out the gate. Five horses galloped out from the side-door on the west of

the mansion and stopped directly in front of the gate. Leading the pack was a beautiful horse, white as snow, with a silver bridle and stirrups. A young man wearing silk clothing, roughly eighteen years of age, sat on the horse with a sword hanging from his belt and a bow strapped onto his back. A hunting falcon perched on his left shoulder as the horse strode along the street. The four horsemen following him were all dressed in tight, black outfits.

“The Young Master is going hunting!” three guards shouted in unison.

The young man smiled and cracked his whip in the air cockily. Answering the command, the white horse neighed happily and dashed along the stone slab road.

“Escort Shi,” one of the guards yelled out, “how about bringing back a wild boar, so we can all have a feast!”

A forty-year-old horseman, trailing behind, grinned back. “Don’t worry! I will be sure to save the boar’s tail for you. Just don’t get drunk before we get back.”

Amid the loud laughter, the five horsemen vanished like the wind.

Just after they exited the town gate, Lin Pingzhi,<sup>2</sup> the Young Master of the Escort House, spurred his horse lightly; the steed picked up speed and soon left the rest of the pack far behind. After riding up a small slope, he set the falcon to work. Minutes later, a pair of yellow rabbits was flushed out from the bushes. Lin Pingzhi quickly grabbed the bow from his back. Pulling out an arrow from his saddlebag, he took aim and shot in one smooth action. One rabbit down, one more to go. But by the time he pulled out another arrow and was ready to shoot again, the other rabbit had disappeared behind the bushes.

Escort Zheng rode by with a smile. “Nice shot, Young Master!” he praised.

“Young Master, hurry, we’ve found pheasants here!” Henchman Bai shouted in the woods to the left.



Lin Pingzhi rushed over and saw a pheasant flying out from the bushes, heading directly toward his head. He pulled out an arrow rapidly and fired at the pheasant but missed. Reflexively, he lashed his whip at the pheasant. With a cracking sound, the pheasant fell to the ground, its bright and colorful feathers scattering in all directions. All five men cheered.

"What a swift lash! Even a large griffon wouldn't escape that," Escort Shi exclaimed.

The party hunted in the woods for over four hours. Intending to let the Young Master have a good time, the two escorts, Shi and Zheng, and the two henchmen, Bai and Chen, always drove the prey toward the young man, even when they themselves had the better shot. By the end of the hunt, Lin Pingzhi had shot two more rabbits and two more pheasants. But Young Master Lin wanted to hunt more. Not finding enough excitement from small prey, he yearned for larger game.

"Let's go a bit deeper into the woods, and see what we can find," he exclaimed eagerly.

Escort Shi thought to himself, "If we go too deep into the woods, as the Young Master wishes, he probably won't quit until after dark. Surely, the Madam will complain when we get back. That won't be good." So he replied, "It is quite late already. There are lots of sharp rocks around that might damage the hooves of your white horse. Why don't we try our luck again early tomorrow morning?"

He knew that it would be very hard to dissuade the stubborn Young Master, but Lin Pingzhi loved his white horse so much that he wouldn't risk any chance of injuring his precious pet. The colt had been given to Lin Pingzhi as a present on his seventeenth birthday two years ago. It had come from a foreign country, and had cost his grandmother in Luoyang, a fair amount of gold.

Just as Shi had expected, his suggestion worked.

"My Snow Dragon is clever enough to not step on sharp rocks, but I am not so sure about your horses. Alright, let's head back then. We wouldn't want Henchman Chen to crack his bottom somewhere on those sharp rocks, would we?" grinned Lin Pingzhi, patting his horse on the neck.

Howling with laughter, all five turned around and started to head back home. Lin Pingzhi rode ahead of everyone else, but did not take the same route by which they had come. Instead, he turned north and sprinted forward. Feeling satisfied after some rapid riding, he finally reined in the horse and let it trot slowly.

The sign of a wine shop emerged from one side of the road, not far ahead.

"Young Master, how about a drink here? The fresh rabbits and pheasants we've got would go perfectly with some good wine," Escort Zheng suggested.

"So, you didn't come out for hunting, but rather for drinking, did you? I suppose if I don't bribe you with some drinks, you wouldn't want to come out again tomorrow." Lin Pingzhi grinned as he dismounted and started walking toward the wine shop.

Normally, the owner of the wine shop, Old Cai, would have hurried out to take the reins and flattered Lin with some praise. "Well lookee thar, the Young Master's gotten so much game today! Ain't he great! There ain't many who can match his skills," Old Cai would exclaim. But today, when they came to the door, they were greeted with complete silence. A girl, dressed in green, stood by the wine vat with her hair done up in two buns, and with a wooden hairpin holding each in place; she appeared to be busy fussing with it. Her back was towards them and she seemed to have no intention of turning around.

"Where is Old Cai? Get out and tether our horses," Escort Zheng yelled impatiently.

Henchmen Bai and Chen pulled out a bench, brushed off the dust with their sleeves, and let Lin Pingzhi sit down. The

two escorts sat with Lin Pingzhi while the two henchmen sat down at another table. Coughing sounds floated out from the backroom, and moments later, a gray-haired old man walked out.

“Welcome, sirs. Can I bring you some wine?” the old man greeted the group of five in a distinctly northern accent.

“Do we look like we are here for tea?” Escort Zheng retorted. “Of course we want wine. Get us three jugs of Bamboo Green.<sup>3</sup> Where’s Old Cai? What’s going on? Are you the new owner here?”

“Yes, sir! Coming right up! Wan’er, bring three jugs of Bamboo Green,” the old man called out at the girl. “To be frank with you misters, my name is Sa. I was born in this town, but I left to be a trader when I was young. Recently, my son and my daughter-in-law both passed away. I figured that no matter how tall a tree is, its leaves will always fall to the roots, so I brought my granddaughter back to my hometown. But since I’ve been gone for over forty some years, my relatives and my friends had either passed away or left town. Luckily, the previous owner of this wine shop, Old Cai, happened to want out, so he sold it to me for thirty taels<sup>4</sup> of silver. I am finally back now. I feel happy just listening to the hometown dialect. But it’s so embarrassing that I’ve totally forgotten the dialect myself.”

The girl in the green robe came back with a wooden tray. She set down the bowls and chopsticks, and then placed three jugs of wine on the table. When she finished, she walked away with her head down, never even sneaked a peek at the customers all the while. Lin Pingzhi watched as the girl walked away. She had a slim figure, but her skin was dark and rough. Pox marks covered her face, which made it appear very ugly. Lin Pingzhi thought that the reason she was so rigid was probably because she had only started waiting on tables not too long ago, so he paid no more attention to her.

Escort Shi brought out a pheasant and a yellow rabbit, and handed them to old man Sa. "Clean them up and cook them well," he ordered.

"Yes, sir! Right away! Would you like some jerky and peanuts to go with the wine, sirs?" old man Sa asked.

Wan'er placed some beef jerky and peanuts on the table, not waiting for old man Sa's order.

"Our Young Mister Lin here is the Young Master of the Fortune Prestige Escort House. He always aids the needy and assists the weak. Money, to him, is like dirt. If you cook the two dishes well and make his stomach happy, you can easily make back that thirty taels investment you spent in a matter of months," Escort Zheng introduced.

"Oh, yes, yes! Many thanks!!" old man Sa answered cheerfully as he picked up the pheasant and the rabbit and went into the kitchen.

Escort Zheng poured the wine into all three cups. Raising his own cup, he poured it all down his throat, then after smacking his lips a few times, he said contentedly, "The owner has changed, but fortunately the wine is still the same."

He poured himself another cup and was just about to drink it, when suddenly, the drum of hoof beats rose from a distance and then came to an abrupt stop outside the shop. Two horsemen had ridden in from the north. Traveling at a blazing speed, they had arrived at the small shop in no time at all.

"Hey, it's a wine shop. Let's go in for a couple of drinks," one of the riders shouted.

Escort Shi recognized that the speaker had a distinct accent of western Sichuan.<sup>5</sup> He turned around and spotted two men in purple robes. They tied the reins of their horses to the big banyan tree outside the shop and walked in. Giving the escorts a casual glance, they made a big display of sitting down. Both had a strip of white cloth wrapped around their foreheads. At first glance, with their purple robes, they

seemed to be fairly cultured people, but since both had bare legs showing in the open and bare feet in hemp shoes, they were unlikely to be so.<sup>6</sup> Escort Shi knew that most people from Sichuan dressed in this manner. The strips of white cloths on their foreheads were worn in mourning for the death<sup>7</sup> of Marquis Zhuge Liang.<sup>8</sup> The Marquis did so many great things for the people of Sichuan and was so well respected that even a thousand years after his death, people still wore white mourning cloths on their foreheads in his memory.

Lin Pingzhi had never seen people dressed like this before. "Their dress looks neither civilian nor martial. It's very strange indeed," he thought to himself.

"Wine, get me some wine! So many damn mountains here. Our horses are really tired out!" the younger of the two yelled out.

"What can I get for you?" Wan'er walked to their table and asked. She looked down at the floor while asking the question, so that the two could not see her face. Her voice was low, but sounded very clear and pleasant. The younger man was dazed for a second. Unexpectedly, his right hand shot out and raised Wan'er's chin.

"What a pity!" He snickered.

Wan'er gasped and quickly drew herself back.

The younger man's companion burst into laughter. "Brother Yu, this chick has a nice body, but as for her face, look how pockmarked it is!! Just like the inside of a pomegranate!" The younger man laughed even louder.

Lin Pingzhi's anger flared. He slapped the table hard and shouted, "What kind of creatures are you, you two blind scoundrels? How dare you to come to Fuzhou and behave so ill-manneredly?"

"Hey, Jia Junior, somebody seems really upset. Who do you think this sissy is referring to?" the younger fellow, Yu, said with a smirk.

Lin Pingzhi was fair of face, and looked much like his mother. Even under normal circumstances, he would have slapped someone just for staring at him. Hearing the word sissy, his temper flared. He grabbed a tin kettle from the table and hurled it at the two men. Yu shifted back slightly; the kettle missed him and sailed out the door, landing on the meadow outside. Wine from the kettle splashed everywhere. Escorts Shi and Zheng sprang up immediately and rushed up to the two men.

"This boy should play a little bitch in the opera. I bet you he would seduce quite a few men. But I doubt he's any good at fighting." Yu grinned sneeringly.

"This is the Young Master Lin from the Fortune Prestige Escort House. You've really got the nerve to offend him!" Escort Zheng hollered. As he spat out the last word, his left fist was already on its way toward Yu's face. Yu deflected the punch with his left palm, then grabbed Zheng's wrist and pulled hard. Escort Zheng lost his balance and fell toward the table. Yu then struck Zheng's neck with his left elbow. With a crash, the table collapsed to the ground, along with Zheng.

Although Zheng was not in the top echelon of fighters at the Escort House, he was not at the bottom either. Seeing that Escort Zheng had been knocked down by Yu within just one move, Escort Shi knew the two would make tough opponents.

"Friends, who are you?" he asked. "If you are also the members of the Martial World, haven't you heard of the Fortune Prestige Escort House?"

"Fortune Prestige Escort House? Never heard of it. What the hell is that?" Yu smirked.

"We are in the business of teaching manners to lowlifes such as you," Lin Pingzhi leapt over with a roar. He struck out with his left hand, but before fully extending his arm, his right hand struck out from underneath his left hand. This maneuver was called "Cloud Concealed Glare" and was a move from the Lin Family's Kung Fu style of Universal Hands.

“Ho! This sissy boy actually knows a few tricks,” Yu exclaimed mockingly, blocking the blow with his left arm and stretching out his right hand to grab Lin Pingzhi’s shoulder.

Lin Pingzhi lowered his right shoulder in evasion, and attempted to punch Yu with his left fist. Yu ducked his head from the punch, but to his surprise, Lin Pingzhi’s fist opened and changed from a punch into a palm strike. With the move called “Flowers in the Fog,” he slapped Yu hard across the face.

Now Yu went berserk. He threw a kick at Lin Pingzhi, who stepped to the right and returned a kick at Yu. While the two fought, Escort Shi had already engaged in a fight with Jia, and Henchman Bai helped Escort Zheng up from the ground. Swearing at the top of his lungs, Zheng leapt forward and joined Lin Pingzhi in the fight against Yu.

“Go help Escort Shi! I can handle this punk!” Lin Pingzhi shouted.

Escort Zheng knew that the Young Master always wanted to best others, and did not want extra help, so he picked up a broken table leg and swung it at Jia’s head. In the meantime, the two henchmen had run outside. One took Lin Pingzhi’s sword, which was hanging from the saddle, while the other grabbed a hunting fork, and then both started pouring out all manner of profanity at the top of their lungs. Retainers of the Escort House were not good fighters, but because they were the ones shouting out the escort songs during trips, they all had loud voices. They cursed in the local dialect. The two men from Sichuan had no clue as to what they were saying, but they knew that it must have been something quite uncomplimentary.

Lin Pingzhi focused on using moves from the Universal Hands style to fight Yu. He had practiced this form and beaten many escorts in the Escort House. This was partly because this form of martial arts was indeed excellent, and partly because no one from the Escort House, who valued his employment, was stupid enough to beat the Young Master,

thus, even though Lin Pingzhi had a good understanding of the form, he did not have much actual fighting experience. He had also fought some local rascals in Fuzhou before; however, no street thug could prevail against the fighting style of the great Lin Family. In less than three moves, they would all end up running away with either a swollen face or a bloody nose. But things were quite different this time. After only a dozen or so moves, Lin Pingzhi had to swallow his pride and admit that his opponent was really tough.

While the two exchanged punches, Yu kept taunting Lin Pingzhi with insults. "Hey, buddy! The more I look at you, the more you look like a girl dressed as a guy. Look at those lovely cheeks of yours. Why don't we stop fighting, so I can give you a big kiss? What do you say?"

Lin Pingzhi was enraged. He glanced over at Escorts Shi and Zheng, only to find that they were not faring well, even though it was two against one. Zheng had been punched hard on the nose; blood was all over his face and his clothes. Lin Pingzhi hastened his moves and, unexpectedly, was able to slap Yu in the face a second time. It was a heavy slap.

"Son of a turtle!" Yu snarled. "I was just playing with you, you loser. You want to fight for real now?" He suddenly changed his tactics and sped up his moves. Punches poured down upon Lin Pingzhi like a thunderstorm.

The two fought from the inside of the shop to the outside. Seeing a punch aimed directly at his solar plexus, Lin Pingzhi remembered the release-block technique his father had taught him, so he tried to block it with his left arm, but Yu's punch was so powerful that he failed to stop it. The punch sent a shock throughout his entire spine, and before he was able to gather himself, Yu's left hand grabbed him by the collar and jerked him down hard. Lin Pingzhi's torso caved in to Yu's strength and bent forward. In the next second, Yu's right arm was already pushing down on the back of Lin Pingzhi's neck with a move called the "Iron Threshold."



"You son of a turtle! If you kowtow<sup>9</sup> to me and call me Great Uncle three times, I might let you go." Yu laughed scornfully.

Escorts Shi and Zheng were stunned. They wanted to rush over and rescue Lin Pingzhi, but were kept at bay by Jia's nonstop kicks and punches.

Henchman Bai thrust the hunting fork at Yu's back. "Punk, let go of him! Who the hell do you think you are...?" he yelled loudly.

Yu threw a reverse kick with his left foot, which knocked the fork out of Bai's grip and sent it flying into the air. He immediately followed with another backward kick, using his right foot, sending Henchman Bai rolling to the ground.

"You stinking turtle egg god damned bastard! The hell with you! Your grandma has no eyeballs!" Henchman Chen started cursing furiously. But with each curse, he took a step back, so after eight or nine of them, he was already far from the scene of the fight.

"Hey, sissy boy, are you going to kowtow or not?" Yu laughed. He pushed down even harder, pressing Lin Pingzhi's head almost to the ground. Lin Pingzhi tried to punch at Yu's stomach, but the punches always fell a few inches short. Lin felt unbearable pain from his neck as if it was going to break. Sparkles glittered in front of his eyes and his eardrums were filled with buzzing sounds. He clawed and scratched like a wild cat, when suddenly, his fingers came upon a hard object that was strapped on his shin. Without thinking, he pulled it out and stabbed it at Yu with all his might.

Yu let out a sudden shriek and let go of Lin Pingzhi. Dread and terror covered his face as Yu stumbled back in disbelief. The dagger had pierced through his stomach all the way, leaving only the handle showing. He was facing west, and the golden handle of the dagger glinted crazily in the rays of the setting sun. He opened his mouth wide, but no sound came out. He reached for the dagger with his hand, but then paused, too afraid to touch the shining handle.

Stumbling back several steps, Lin Pingzhi also looked on in shock. His heart almost jumped out of his throat. Jia and the two escorts stopped fighting and looked at Yu in astonishment. Yu finally gathered enough courage to grab the protruding handle. Blood gushed from the wound as he pulled out the dagger. The onlookers cried out in disbelief.

“Jia...Jia...Tell my father, se...seek...vengeance...for...!” Yu hissed before dropping the dagger and falling forward onto the ground. His torso twitched a few times and finally stopped moving.

“Brother Yu, Brother Yu!” Jia rushed to his side and cried out bitterly.

“Get your weapons!” Escort Shi whispered. He darted to his horse and drew out his long knife. As an experienced escort, he knew only too well that Jia would stop at nothing to avenge the death of his companion.

Jia glared murderously at Lin Pingzhi for a few seconds, and then quickly retrieved the dagger from the ground and dashed to his horse. He mounted in a hurry, and without wasting time to untie the reins he cut the horse loose with a swift slash of the dagger. Jia spurred his horse hard, and within moments, both the horse and its rider disappeared into the northern horizon.

Henchman Chen walked up to Yu’s body and kicked it hard, sending it rolling over. Blood continued to gush from the wound.

“You big moron, how dare you insult our Young Master? Now you’ve learned your lesson.”

But Lin Pingzhi had never killed anyone before. His face turned pale with fright. “Escort Shi...what shall we do? I never...I didn’t mean to kill him.” His voice trembled.

Escort Shi pondered on the matter, “The Fortune Prestige Escort House has been around for three generations. Getting into fights and having people die while on the job is simply unavoidable. But normally the victims are either bandits or unorthodox members of the Martial World, and these fights

usually happen in some remote mountain or deep forest. Afterwards, we simply bury the corpses and forget about the whole thing. Of course, the bandits would never go to the authorities and report the killing. But this time, the victim is obviously not a bandit, and the scene is close to a populated area. Murder is no small crime. Even the son of a governor or mayor wouldn't be able to get off easily if they committed such a crime, let alone the Young Master of an Escort House." Reflecting upon these facts, he came to a decision.

"Let's move the body into the shop," he said with a frown. "It's too close to the road here. We don't want anyone to see this."

Luckily it was already quite late, and there was no one passing by. Henchmen Bai and Chen hauled the body into the shop.

"Young Master, do you have any money on you?" Escort Shi whispered to Lin Pingzhi.

"Yeah, I do!" Lin Pingzhi answered anxiously, as he took all of his money out in a hurry. There were about twenty taels of silver in all.

Escort Shi took the silver and walked into the shop. Setting the money on the table, he said, "Old Sa, this outsider was harassing your granddaughter, and our Young Master was just trying to help. He didn't want to kill the man, but he had no choice. All of us witnessed the entire event. The incident originated because of you, so if anybody blows the whistle, no one will get away with it. Take the money and just forget about the whole thing. We'll get rid of the body and pretend nothing ever happened here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," Old Sa nodded.

"Killing a few gangsters is a piece of cake for us when we escort cargos," Escort Zheng exclaimed. "These two Sichuan rats behaved so suspiciously, I bet they were either burglars or rapists. They must have come to Fuzhou looking for crimes to commit. Our Young Master saw through their disguises,

and took care of them for the safety of the town. He should have gone to the authorities for a reward, but our Young Master does not want to go through all that trouble, and he doesn't really care for this kind of fame. You, old friend, had better keep your mouth shut. If you let anything out, we will say that you are their accomplice and that you were just using this wine shop as cover to spy for them. From your accent, anyone could tell that you're not from here. People would say 'How did those two just happen to show up right after you took over the shop? What a coincidence!'"

"I won't say a word. I know nothing," Old Sa said hurriedly in compliance.

Led by Escort Shi, Henchmen Bai and Chen buried the body in the garden behind the shop; they also cleaned up all the bloodstains in front of the door.

"If we don't hear anything unusual in ten days," Escort Zheng said to Old Sa, "you'll get yourself another fifty taels of silver. But if you really feel like telling stories...humph! Well, the Fortune Prestige Escort House has killed hundreds of bandits before. It wouldn't be any trouble to plant two more bodies in your garden, would it?"

"We wouldn't dare! We wouldn't dare! Thanks! Many thanks!" Old Sa complied yet again.

It was already dark outside by the time everything was finally handled. Lin Pingzhi relaxed a little, but still felt uneasiness as he went back to the Escort House. When he entered the front hall, he saw his father sitting in a wooden armchair, his eyes shut, lost in thought.

"Dad!" Lin Pingzhi called.

"Went hunting? Caught any boars?" Lin Zhennan opened his eyes and asked with a smile.

"No," Lin Pingzhi replied.

Lin Zhennan lifted the pipe in his hands and suddenly struck down toward Lin Pingzhi's shoulder. "Take that," he exclaimed.

Lin Pingzhi knew that his father always liked to impulsively check up on his progress in fighting skills. Typically, he would have countered this “Plunging Cosmic Star” – the twenty-sixth move in the “Evil-Resisting Sword Art,” with the “Buddha Blossom” – the forty-sixth move. But his mind was so burdened by the incident at the wine shop that he thought his father had already learned about the incident and was bestowing punishment with his pipe. He dared not move, crying out plaintively, “Father!”

Lin Zhennan’s pipe halted just about three inches from his son’s shoulder.

“What’s with you today? You think you’d still have the shoulder when you are actually fighting someone, if you were this clumsy?” Lin Zhennan asked. Although the words were harsh, a smile played about his mouth.

“Understood!” Lin Pingzhi responded. He dropped his left shoulder and rapidly spun his body around, stepping behind his father. Snatching up a feather duster from the tea table, he thrust it at Lin Zhennan’s back. This was the move called the “Buddha Blossom.”

“That’s the right move!” Lin Zhennan nodded in approval. He passed his pipe across his back and parried the thrust, then countered with a move known as the “Flute-Play on the River.”

Lin Pingzhi was much more focused now. He blocked the attack with “Purple Mist East Bound.”

Both father and son continued fighting until, after roughly fifty moves, Lin Zhennan swiftly poked his son on the chest just below the right nipple with the handle of his pipe. Not able to fend off the attack in time, Lin Pingzhi felt a sudden soreness in his right arm, and dropped the feather duster immediately.

“Good! Very good! You have shown progress every single day of this month! You lasted four more moves than yesterday!” Lin Zhennan smiled gleefully and sat back down. “Pingzhi, guess what! Our Escort House has received

wonderful news today,” he announced while filling his pipe with fresh tobacco leaves.

Lin Pingzhi took out a firestone and lit the pipe for his father. “Did you just sign off on a big business deal today?” he inquired.

Lin Zhennan shook his head.

“As long as our Escort House offers good services, business will come to us! Our only concern is our own ability – are we capable of fulfilling big contracts – when they do come to us?”

He inhaled deeply, and then blew out a cloud of smoke.

“Escort Zhang sent us a message from Hunan.<sup>10</sup> Master Yu of the Pine-Wind Temple, the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School, in Western Sichuan, has accepted our gifts.”

Hearing the words “Western Sichuan” and “Master Yu,” Lin Pingzhi’s heart almost jumped from his throat. “Accepted our gifts?” he repeated in a mutter.

“I haven’t really told you much about the business of the Escort House,” Lin Zhennan went on. “You wouldn’t have understood anyway. But you are growing up fast, and the heavy burden of running the Escort House will slowly shift onto your shoulders. It’s time for you to start playing a larger part in the business of the Escort House. Son, we’ve been in the escort business for three generations. We have been able to expand to today’s scale and become the largest and most renowned Escort House south of the Yangtze River. How did we accomplish this? First, because of the great fame of your great grandfather; second, because of the fighting techniques our ancestors have handed down, generation after generation. Anyone mentioning the name of ‘Fortune Prestige Escort House’ will give a thumb’s up and say, ‘What fortune! What prestige!’ In the escorting business, reputation counts for twenty percent, real fighting skills count for twenty percent, but the final sixty percent depends on your

relationship with both the unorthodox and orthodox members of the Martial World.”

Blowing out another cloud of smoke, he continued.

“Think about it. Our wagons have to pass through ten different provinces. If we had to fight every time we went on a job, how many men would we have lost? Even if we won every single time, it would be like in the old saying: ‘To kill a thousand enemies, sacrifice eight hundred of your own.’ If any of our escorts were injured or killed on the job, the money we earned wouldn’t even be enough to cover the compensation to their families. Soon, we would run out of our own savings as well. That’s why we escorts have to know all the right people and spare no expense to cultivate relationships. Connections are even more powerful than the fist.”

“Yes, Father.” Lin Pingzhi answered. Under normal circumstances, he would have become quite excited and asked many questions upon hearing about the business end of running the Escort House, yet today all he could think of were the words “Western Sichuan” and “Master Yu.” His heart pounded wildly.

“Your father’s Kung Fu is surely not as good as either your grandfather’s, or your great grandfather’s.” Lin Zhennan exhaled another cloud of smoke. “But my management skills are definitely better than either of theirs. Your great grandfather founded the business in four provinces: from Fujian to Guangdong in the south, and north to Zhejiang and Jiangsu. I expanded the business to six more provinces: Shandong, Hebei, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi and Guangxi. What’s the secret here? Let me tell you: make many friends and few enemies. Our Escort House is called ‘Fortune Prestige.’ Remember, fortune comes before prestige; this means fortune is more important than prestige. Fortune will only come if you keep ‘making many friends and few enemies.’ If we change it to ‘Prestige and Fortune,’ wouldn’t that mean we would ride roughshod over others for glory? Ha-ha!”

Lin Pingzhi forced a hollow laugh, which was devoid of amusement.

Lin Zhennan didn't notice his son's uneasiness and went on. "The old saying goes, 'Covet Sichuan after capturing Gansu.'<sup>11</sup> But for us, it's 'Covet Sichuan after capturing Hubei.' Our escort route starts from Fujian, goes west through Jiangxi and Hunan, and stops at Hubei. Why shouldn't we continue all the way west, up the river into the province of Sichuan? Sichuan is called the Heavenly Kingdom. There are lots of wealthy people there. If we made it through to Sichuan, we could go either north to Shanxi or south into Yunnan and Guizhou; our business would increase by at least another thirty percent. But Sichuan is a place of crouching tigers and hidden dragons. To do business there, we would have to have connections with the two schools, Qingcheng and Emei.<sup>12</sup> For the past three years, I have been sending valuable gifts to the Pine-Wind Temple of the Qingcheng Sword School and the Golden-Peak Temple of the Emei School every spring and autumn, but neither school would accept our overtures. Priest Radiance, the Head Master of the Emei School, would at least greet the gift bearers, thank them and invite them in for a vegetarian meal, then return the gifts without even breaking the seal. Master Yu of the Pine-Wind Temple is even trickier. His apprentices would stop the gift bearers halfway up the mountain, claiming that Master Yu was in Exclusive Meditation<sup>13</sup> at the moment, and unable to see any guest. They would also claim that they already had everything they needed in the temple, so that there was no need for any gifts. Our escorts couldn't even tell which direction the gate of the Pine-Wind Temple faced, let alone meet Master Yu. When they came back, they were infuriated. If it weren't because of the specific orders I gave them before the trip to behave with restraint and respect, regardless of how ill-treated they were, they would probably have called them all manner of names and picked several fights."



After these words, Lin Zhennan stood up, a proud smile blossoming on his face. "And guess what? At long last, Master Yu has accepted our gifts, and has even sent four of his apprentices to return the courtesy and thank us in person...."

"Four apprentices? Not two?" Lin Pingzhi asked breathlessly.

"Yes, four apprentices!" Lin Zhennan answered. "Master Yu is really handling this matter quite solemnly. This will make our Escort House look especially good!! I've just sent messengers to our branches in Jiangxi, Hunan and Hubei, informing them of the news and told them to treat these four as our noble guests."

"Father, when people from Sichuan speak, do they usually call others 'son of a turtle'?" Lin Pingzhi suddenly blurted out a question.

"Only bumpkins from Sichuan speak that way. There are rustics everywhere, and of course they are not taught proper manners. Listen to our own henchmen talk when they gamble. They're no better. Why do you ask?" Lin Zhennan chuckled.

"Never mind," Lin Pingzhi replied quickly.

"When the four Qingcheng apprentices come, you should spend some good amount of time with them; watch and learn how students of prestigious schools act. Making friends with them will surely benefit you later on in life."

Both father and son continued chatting some more, but Lin Pingzhi couldn't make up his mind if he should tell his father about the incident at the wine shop, and finally decided that he would tell his mother first. After dinner, the family of three remained in the Back Hall to converse. Lin Zhennan was having a discussion with his wife as to what gift to get for her brother's birthday in June. It would be tricky to find something appropriate that the Golden-Blade Wang family in Luoyang<sup>14</sup> would hold in high esteem.

Suddenly, uproar came from outside, and moments later, several people rushed into the room.

“Where are your manners?” Lin Zhennan frowned.

Three henchmen had burst in. The man in front muttered in a disturbed tone, “Chief...Chief Master....”

“What’s the matter?” Lin Zhennan snapped in annoyance.

“Bai...Bai is dead,” Henchman Chen blurted out the words.

Lin Zhennan was slightly astounded. “Who killed him? Gambling must’ve led to the quarrelling!” He became quite angry, thinking how hard it was to regulate the roughnecks of the Escort House. They would often fight and draw their knives for no reason. And, as the Escort House was headquartered in the capital of the province, it could be rather troublesome if someone was killed on their premise.

“No, it is not like that,” Chen explained hastily. “Xiao Li was going to the outhouse just a minute ago and saw Bai lying in the garden nearby. His body was already cold, but there’s not a single wound on the body. No one knows how he died. Must’ve been some kind of a disease.”

Lin Zhennan breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed immediately. “Let me go have a look.” He started walking toward the garden and Lin Pingzhi followed behind.

When they arrived at the yard, a number of escorts and henchmen had already gathered around the body. Seeing the arrival of the Chief Master, the crowd moved back. Lin Zhennan took a close look at Bai’s corpse. Bai’s clothes had been unbuttoned, and clearly, there were no bloodstains.

“No wounds at all?” Lin Zhennan asked Escort Zhu, who stood next to him.

“I’ve examined the body carefully, and there’s not a single wound anywhere on the body. It does not look like poison either,” Escort Zhu replied, to which Lin Zhennan acknowledged with a nod.

“Tell Dong the bookkeeper to arrange a funeral for Bai, and don’t forget to send a hundred taels of silver to his family,” Lin Zhennan directed.

The death of a henchman due to illness was not something Lin Zhennan would pay much attention to. "Didn't Bai go hunting with you today?" he asked Lin Pingzhi after walking back to the living room.

"Yes, he did. He looked fine when we got back. Who'd think he would catch a deadly disease so unexpectedly," Lin Pingzhi replied.

"Many things in this world are like that," Lin Zhennan commented. "Whether good or evil, they always happen in an unexpected manner. I've always wanted to open the escort trail through the province of Sichuan. I thought it would have taken at least another ten years. Who would have expected that Master Yu would somehow be prompted by some sudden impulse to not only accept my gifts, but to also send four apprentices such a long way to thank us?"

"Father, although the Qingcheng Sword School is well-renowned, our Fortune Prestige Escort House is fairly famous too. We have been sending gifts to Sichuan year after year; it's only natural for Master Yu to send people our way to show his gratitude as well."

"What do you know?" Lin Zhennan chuckled. "Qingcheng and Emei have been around for hundreds of years. They've had many outstanding disciples in their schools. Maybe they aren't as famous as Shaolin or Wutang,<sup>15</sup> but they certainly have enough fame to be placed next to Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, and Heng-Shan of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance.<sup>16</sup> Your great grandfather, Sir Yuantu, founded the seventy-two moves of 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art.' This set of sword techniques shocked the entire Martial Arts Society and gained him great fame. You could say that he never met his match in swordplay. After this sword style was passed on to your grandfather, its eminence declined. It was then passed on to me, and I am afraid that it has declined even more in my hands. The Lin Family had only one child in each generation for the last three generations. We don't even have

any apprentices. With only you and me, we really don't have the same kind of manpower that those other schools have."

"We could gather all the people from our Escort Houses in the ten provinces, and then we could take on any of them – Shaolin, Wutang, Emei, Qingcheng, or the Five Mountains Sword Alliance," Lin Pingzhi declared.

Lin Zhennan was amused. "Son, it's alright to say something like that when you are talking to me. But if you had said those words to an outsider, you'd get into a lot of trouble. The eighty-four escorts we have at our ten Escort Houses, each has his own specialty. Of course, when we all gather together, we aren't afraid of anyone, but what do we gain by beating other people? It is well said that manners and amicability make great fortunes; this is especially true for us in the escort business. What are we going to lose by being humble? Let the others go around showing off."

"Oh no! Escort Zheng is dead too!" somebody suddenly yelled out from outside. Lin Zhennan and Lin Pingzhi were both dumbstruck.

Lin Pingzhi jumped out of his chair and muttered, "They're back for re...!" It took him great effort to finally swallow the word "revenge" back down his throat. Lin Zhennan was already on his way out and didn't catch what Lin Pingzhi had just said.

Henchman Chen rushed in and yelled incoherently, "Chief...Chief Master! Trouble! Escort Zheng...Escort Zheng's spirit is possessed by the Sichuan demon too."

"Stop this nonsense! What Sichuan demon?" Lin Zhennan roared with a stern face.

"Sir! The demon...the man from Sichuan was already very ferocious when he was alive; naturally he would be more terrifying after death..." Chen said lamely. Seeing the Chief Master's hard countenance, he dared not continue, and only looked to Lin Pingzhi with a mixed expression of fear and grief.

“Did you say Escort Zheng was dead? Where’s the body? How did he die?” Lin Zhennan asked impatiently.

Several more escorts and henchmen rushed into the hall. “Brother Zheng died in the stable,” one escort answered with a frown. “He died in exactly the same way as Henchman Bai. There wasn’t a single wound on his body, and no bleeding could be found from any aperture. No swelling on his face either. Maybe...maybe they became haunted by some kind of demon when they...when they went hunting with the Young Master.”

Lin Zhennan snorted. “I’ve lived all my life without ever seeing either a ghost or a demon. Let’s go take a look.” He walked out of the hall and into the stable.

Escort Zheng’s body lay on the ground, his hands still holding onto a saddle. Apparently, he had been taking the saddle off before his sudden demise. There was no sign of any struggle.

As it was already dark outside, Lin Zhennan asked a henchman to hold a lantern while he examined Escort Zheng. He carefully checked all parts of the corpse, including all the major bones, but failed to find any sign of injury – not even a broken finger. Lin Zhennan was not superstitious. When Bai had died suddenly, it was just a strange occurrence. Now, that Escort Zheng died in the exact same way, it had to be more than a coincidence. If they died of plague or some kind of disease, why were there no red or black spots on the bodies? Could the two deaths have been related to something that happened during his son’s hunting trip?

He turned around and asked Lin Pingzhi, “Besides Escort Zheng and Henchman Bai, it was just Escort Shi and him who went hunting with you, right?” He indicated Henchman Chen.

Lin Pingzhi nodded.

“You two come with me,” Lin Zhennan said firmly. Turning to another henchman, he instructed, “Go ask Escort Shi to

report to the East Hall immediately. I want to have a word with him."

Soon, the three arrived at the East Hall. "What really happened?" Lin Zhennan asked his son. Lin Pingzhi hastily confessed and told his father all about the trouble he had at the wine shop: how they went in for some drinks; how the two men from Sichuan accosted the girl, which resulted in the fight; how the fight broke out and the man attempted to push Lin's head down to kowtow; how he pulled out a dagger and killed that person; and how they buried the body in the back garden and gave old man Sa some silver to keep him quiet. He told everything there was to tell, without leaving anything out.

The more Lin Zhennan heard, the more concerned he became. But still, getting into a fight with an outsider and having it result in his death was not the end of the world. He listened to the whole story from his son without turning a hair. When Lin Pingzhi finished, he pondered in silence for a moment and then asked, "Did these two fellows ever mention which clan or gang they belonged to?"

"Not a word," Lin Pingzhi answered quickly.

"When they spoke or did things, did you notice anything unusual?" Lin Zhennan inquired further.

"I didn't see anything unusual. The fellow Yu...."

"Did you say the man's name was Yu?" Lin Zhennan interrupted.

"Yes. I heard the other guy calling him Brother Yu. But it might have been something else. They had accents, so I couldn't understand them too well."

"It can't be! It can't be a coincidence. Master Yu said he was going to send someone over; how could they have arrived at Fuzhou so quickly? They don't have wings," Lin Zhennan shook his head and muttered to himself.

"Father, you don't think those two were from the Qingcheng Sword School, do you?" Lin Pingzhi's voice quivered.

Lin Zhennan did not answer; instead, he performed a move and asked, "When you attacked him using this move from the Universe Hands, how did he fend it off?"

"He couldn't fend off that move, so I slapped him hard on the face," Lin Pingzhi replied.

"Good! Very good! Excellent!" Lin Zhennan smiled.

The room had been filled with foreboding, but now that Lin Zhennan showed a smile, Lin Pingzhi felt quite relieved and could not help smiling himself.

"When you hit him with this move, how did he respond?" Lin Zhennan asked again, performing more different moves as he spoke.

"I was infuriated at the time, and can't remember too well. I think I punched him in the chest," Lin Pingzhi replied.

Hearing that, Lin Zhennan became even more relaxed. "Very good! Your move should have hit him that way. If he couldn't even block a simple move like that, he couldn't be a close relative to the famous Master Yu of the Qingcheng Sword School, Pine-Wind Temple."

He kept saying "very good," but he wasn't complementing his son's fighting skills; he was just relieved. There must be many people named Yu in the province of Sichuan; if this particular Yu could not even beat his son, he must have been a terrible fighter. Such a rotten fighter definitely had nothing to do with the Qingcheng Sword School. He kept tapping on the table with his right middle finger as he pondered upon the situation.

"How did he grab hold of your head?" he asked, and Lin Pingzhi demonstrated how he couldn't move when his head was held.

Henchman Chen also felt much encouraged. "Bai was trying to poke him with a hunting fork," he interrupted, "but the fork was knocked out by the guy's back kick and then Bai was also kicked down."

Lin Zhennan felt a shock run through his spine. He asked immediately, "He kicked Bai with a back kick and then

kicked the fork out of his hands? How...how did he perform those kicks?"

"It was something like this." Chen grabbed the back of a chair and threw a reverse kick with his right foot, then jumped and threw another back kick with his left foot. These two kicks looked very clumsy, almost like a horse kicking back its hind legs. Lin Pingzhi watched the two clumsy kicks and could not help laughing. "Dad, see...." But then seeing the fearful expression on his father's face, he stopped abruptly.

"These two kicks seem to be the unique "Shadowless Kick" maneuver of Qingcheng. Son, how did he perform the kicks exactly?" Lin Zhennan inquired.

"My head was held at that moment. I couldn't see how he kicked," Lin Pingzhi said.

"Of course! I'd better ask Escort Shi." Lin Zhennan exited the room and yelled, "Where is Escort Shi? Why isn't he here yet?"

Two henchmen came over and reported that nobody had yet to be able to find Escort Shi. Feeling the uneasiness growing inside him rapidly, Lin Zhennan paced up and down in the garden hall, thinking, "If the two kicks were indeed the "Shadowless Kick" technique, then even if the fellow was not a close relative of Master Yu, he must've had some kind of connection with the Qingcheng Sword School. If that's the case, then who was he?" He finally decided to check it out himself. So he ordered the henchmen, "Go get Escort Cui and Escort Ji."

Escorts Cui and Ji were the careful types, both experienced and prudent, and well trusted by Lin Zhennan. Having heard about the sudden death of Escort Zheng and the disappearance of Escort Shi, they were already waiting outside the hall. As soon as they heard their names called, both walked into the room.

"We need to go check something out," Lin Zhennan explained. "Escort Cui, Escort Ji, my son, and Chen, come



with me.”

With Lin Pingzhi leading the way, the group of five rode out of town, and headed north. Soon, they arrived at the small wine shop. The door of the shop was shut.

“Old man Sa, old man Sa! Open the door,” Lin Pingzhi pounded on the door and called out. He knocked and knocked, but there was no response.

Escort Cui signaled to Lin Zhennan if they should bash down the door. After getting a nod from Lin Zhennan, he struck the door with both hands. With a resounding crack, the door’s bolt snapped, and the swinging doors squeaked back and forth on the rusty hinges.

Escort Cui pulled Lin Pingzhi to the side as soon as he forced the door open. They waited until they were sure that there was no sound coming from within. Lighting a fire, they entered, and then lit an oil lamp sitting on the table along with two lanterns. They searched both the interior and exterior of the shop, yet found no one. However, blankets, trunks, and other everyday accessories were still in the shop.

“The old fellow got scared. There was a murder here and the body was even buried right in the back garden. He was afraid of getting into trouble, so he just ran off,” Lin Zhennan said with a nod. Walking into the garden and pointing to a hoe that was leaning against the wall, he commanded, “Chen, dig the body up.”

Chen was nearly convinced that the whole crisis had been caused by demons, so after digging only a short while, he felt his limbs getting stiffer and stiffer. He felt so weak that his legs started to give out.

“Utterly useless! How can you even call yourself a henchman?” Escort Ji yelled at him sternly.

He handed his lantern to Chen, took the hoe from him, and then began digging. Not long after, the clothes of the dead body appeared. He dug a little deeper and then levering the hoe beneath the corpse, he gave a strong tug, and lifted the body out of the hole.

Chen turned his head away, afraid to look. But gasps of shock suddenly came from the other four. Scared to death, Chen dropped the lantern. The light was extinguished and the garden was enveloped in complete darkness.

Lin Pingzhi's voice quavered when he muttered uneasily, "We definitely buried the Sichuan guy's body, how come... how come...."

"Light the lantern!" Lin Zhennan ordered. He had been keeping calm since the strange events started, but now there was fear in his voice.

Escort Cui lit the lantern, and Lin Zhennan bent down to check on the body. Minutes later, he declared, "Same kind of death, not a single wound at all."

Chen finally gathered enough courage to glance at the body, and then he screamed, "Escort Shi! It's Escort Shi!" The body they had dug out was that of Escort Shi, and the corpse of the man from Sichuan had vanished.

"Something seems strange about this old man Sa," Lin Zhennan said. He grabbed the lantern and hurried back into the room, looking over everything very carefully. But he couldn't find anything unusual, even after inspecting everything in the room – in the wine jugs, underneath the stoves, in the iron pot, and under the table and chairs. Escorts Cui and Ji, and Lin Pingzhi also began examining the different rooms.

"Father, come here and look at this," Lin Pingzhi shouted out suddenly.

Following the sound of his son's voice, Lin Zhennan found Lin Pingzhi in the girl's bedroom holding a green handkerchief in his hand.

"Father, how could a poor girl have a handkerchief like this?" Lin Pingzhi asked, his voice quavering with excitement.

Lin Zhennan took the handkerchief from Lin Pingzhi's hands and examined it carefully. A trace of some kind of light, but sweet, scent soon caught his attention. The

handkerchief was very soft and smooth, yet also quite heavy. It was obviously made from high-quality silk. When he looked at it more carefully, he found three levels of green thread sealing the edges of the handkerchief. In one corner, a small red coral branch was embroidered in great detail.

"Where did you find this?" Lin Zhennan asked.

"It fell underneath the corner of the bed. Maybe they didn't see it when they packed and left in such a hurry," Lin Pingzhi suggested.

Lin Zhennan put his lantern close to the bed and searched, but found nothing else. He muttered, "You said that the girl was very ugly. I suppose she wasn't wearing very expensive clothing, but was she dressed very neatly?"

"I didn't pay much attention. I am sure her dress wasn't filthy, because I would have noticed when she poured wine for me," Lin Pingzhi replied eagerly.

"Brother Cui, what do you think?" Lin Zhennan turned to Escort Cui.

"I think this old man and the young girl must be involved with the deaths of Escorts Shi and Zheng, and Henchman Bai. It's even possible that they were the actual killers," Escort Cui concluded.

"The two fellows from Sichuan must have been in on it too; otherwise, why would they move the dead body?" Escort Ji added.

"But that fellow Yu was harassing the girl. I wouldn't have called him names otherwise. They can't be working together," Lin Pingzhi objected.

"Young Master," Escort Cui explained, "you may not realize it, but we are living in a very dangerous world, and people may intentionally set traps into which others may fall. It happens all the time. Two people pretend to fight, and when someone comes to try and separate them, the two will suddenly turn on him."

"Chief Master, what's your opinion on this?" Escort Ji asked.

"The old man and the young girl must have come for us. I am just not sure if those two fellows from Sichuan were in league with them," Lin Zhennan replied.

"Father, didn't you say that Master Yu of Pine-Wind Temple sent four people over. There...there were exactly four people," Lin Pingzhi muttered restlessly.

These words struck Lin Zhennan like a hammer. "The Fortune Prestige Escort House has always shown great respect to the Qingcheng Sword School, and has never done anything to displease them. Why would Master Yu send people to stir up trouble? Why?!" he muttered to himself.

The four just looked at each other in silence; no one could think of anything to say. After a long while, Lin Zhennan finally spoke.

"Let's move Escort Shi's body inside first. When we get back to the Escort House, don't mention this to anyone. We don't want the authorities to know about this and cause any unnecessary trouble. Humph, the Lin family respects others and wants no trouble, but that doesn't mean we are cowards who won't fight back."

"Chief Master," Escort Ji agreed heartily, "like the old saying goes, 'Keeping an army for a year just for one battle.' All of us will fight for the honor of the Escort House."

"Many thanks!" Lin Zhennan nodded.

The party headed back to town. Just as they were about to reach the Escort House, they saw a big crowd gathered in front of the gate. Countless torches lit the street, turning the night into day. Lin Zhennan's heart missed a beat. He rushed forward.

"Chief Master is back!" several people cried out.

Lin Zhennan dismounted his horse and saw that his wife, Madam Wang, looking extremely angry.

"Look! Humph, someone is trying to challenge us in our home," she exclaimed.

A pair of broken poles lay on the street; each had a flag attached to the end. These were the flags of the Escort

House; someone had cut down the two flagpoles and left them lying on the ground. The broken ends were very smooth, apparently cut with a very sharp blade.

Madam Wang was not carrying a weapon, so she drew Lin Zhennan's long sword out from the sheath at his waist. With two sharp tearing sounds, she cut off the two flags from the broken flagpoles. Picking up the flags, she went inside through the gate.

"Escort Cui, cut the stumps of the two flagpoles down," Lin Zhennan instructed. "Humph, it won't be an easy task to take down the Fortune Prestige Escort House!"

"Yes, sir," Escort Cui answered.

"Damn them! What a bunch of cowards they are, only daring to play these dirty tricks when the Chief Master is not at home," Escort Ji cursed.

Lin Zhennan beckoned his son and the two went into the house while Escort Ji poured out even more profanities. Father and son went into the East Hall where Madam Wang had already spread the flags on two tables. On one of the flags, the eyes of the yellow lion had been cut out, leaving two empty holes. On the other flag, the word "Prestige" had been cut out from the name "Fortune Prestige Escort House."

Lin Zhennan was a patient man with an even temper, but even he could not stand these insults any longer. He struck the table with a resounding blow. One leg of the sandalwood table broke with a crack.

"Father, it's...entirely my fault. I got the family into this situation!" Lin Pingzhi trembled.

"Yes, the Lin family has killed someone. So what? If I ever saw a punk like him, I'd kill him too!" Lin Zhennan roared.

"Who got killed?" Madam Wang asked in surprise.

"Pingzhi, tell your mother about it," Lin Zhennan said.

So Lin Pingzhi told Madam Wang everything that had happened: How he killed the man from Sichuan, how they found the body of Escort Shi in the garden of the wine shop, and so forth.

Madam Wang had heard about the mysterious deaths of Henchman Bai and Escort Zheng. At the news of the death of Escort Shi, she exploded.

"Husband, how can we let others push the Fortune Prestige Escort House around like this? Let's gather our people and go seek justice from the Qingcheng Sword School in Sichuan. We can also invite my father and my brothers to join us."

Since her youth, Madam Wang had been known for having a bad temper. As a maiden, she had no qualms about pulling out a knife for even the smallest of disagreements. Her family, the Golden Blade Wang Family, was a large and powerful family in the city of Luoyang. Everyone would defer to her out of respect for her father, the Unbeatable Golden Blade, Wang Yuanba. Even now, after her son was already a grown man, her hot temper still had not improved much.

"We are still not sure who our enemy is. It might not even be the Qingcheng Sword School. But whoever they are, I doubt they'd stop at two broken flagpoles and two dead escorts..." Lin Zhennan replied when he was suddenly interrupted by the bellowing voice of Madam Wang.

"What else do they want?"

Lin Zhennan cast a sideways glance at Lin Pingzhi and Madam Wang understood instantly. Her heart started pumping fiercely, and her face paled with fear.

"I caused all the trouble. A true man should take full responsibility for his own actions. I won't...won't be afraid." Lin Pingzhi's words were brave enough, but his trembling voice gave him away.

"Humph, they'll have to pass through me first before they can get to you," Madam Wang exclaimed. "The banner of the Fortune Prestige Escort House has been held high for three generations. We've never lost our glory." She turned to Lin Zhennan. "If we can't even settle this little problem, what good are we? How can we look at ourselves in the mirror for the rest of our lives?"

Lin Zhennan nodded to Madam Wang in agreement. "I'll send people to search the town for new faces. Meanwhile, I'll have more people on patrol around the Escort House. You wait here with Pingzhi. Don't let him run around by himself."

"Yes, I understand!" Madam Wang acknowledged.

The couple both understood that Lin Pingzhi would undoubtedly be the next target. The enemy was hidden in the dark while they themselves were exposed under the light. Even if Lin Pingzhi only stepped out of the Escort House for one minute, he would be in grave danger.

Lin Zhennan walked to the Main Hall and gathered the escorts, sending some people to go check out the town, and instructing the rest to patrol the Escort House. All the escorts had heard about the situation. The flagpole of the Escort House being cut down was a slap in the face for each and every one of them. Infuriated, they had already dressed themselves in uniforms and taken up arms. Upon the command of the Chief Master, they instantly obeyed the order wholeheartedly.

Lin Zhennan felt a measure of relief as he witnessed the entire Escort House working in unison, preparing to defend its honor. Walking back inside, he spoke to Lin Pingzhi.

"Pingzhi, your mom hasn't been well for the last couple of days. The enemy will soon be coming; why don't you move into the room outside her bedroom to guard her?"

"I don't need...," Madam Wang rejected, but before finishing the sentence, she suddenly realized what her husband really meant. He wasn't asking their son to guard her; instead, he was really trying to have their son close by, so they could protect him. Their son was a very sensitive and proud young man. If they had asked him to hide behind them, he would probably feel humiliated, and go straight out to challenge the enemy to a fight. That would be too dangerous! So she immediately swallowed the second half of the sentence down her throat.

"That's right, Pingzhi. Mom is having joint problems these days; both my arms and legs feel weak. Your father needs to take care of the Escort House and can't be accompanying me all the time. If the enemy gets in, I won't be able to fight them off."

"I'll stay with you," Lin Pingzhi stated without hesitation.

That night Lin Pingzhi slept on the bed just outside his parents' room. The couple left the door open. Placing their weapons right next to their pillows, they slept dressed, so that they could jump up to fight at any time.

The night passed uneventfully until dawn, when someone outside the window called in a low voice, "Young Master? Young Master!"

Lin Pingzhi had not been able to sleep for the most of the night, and had just fallen asleep, so he didn't wake up.

"What's the matter?" Lin Zhennan asked.

"The Young Master's horse...the horse is dead!" the man outside answered. Lin Pingzhi loved his horse very much, so as soon as the horse's groom found out about the calamity, he rushed to tell Lin Pingzhi.

Roused by the words, Lin Pingzhi sat up in bed. "Let me go look."

Lin Zhennan knew that once again, something had gone terribly wrong, so he hurried to the stable with Lin Pingzhi. The body of the horse lay on the ground. It had been dead for quite some time. As before, there was not a single wound on the corpse.

"Did you hear any noise last night?" Lin Zhennan asked.

"No, sir!" the groom answered.

"Don't get upset. I'll see to it that you receive another good colt." Lin Zhennan patted Lin Pingzhi gingerly on the shoulder, as Lin Pingzhi quietly caressed the horse's corpse, tears emerging from his eyes.

All of a sudden, Henchman Chen burst into the stables shouting in panic, "Chief...Chief Master, it's terrible..."



horrible! All those escorts...the escorts were killed by the demon!"

"What did you say?" Lin Zhennan and Lin Pingzhi asked in unison, their voices filled with incredulity.

"Dead, all dead!" Henchman Chen kept muttering uncontrollably.

"Who is dead?" Lin Pingzhi demanded angrily. He grabbed Chen's collar and shook him hard.

"Young...Young Master...dead!" Chen mumbled dazedly.

Hearing the words "Young Master dead," Lin Zhennan was most disturbed. But he did not want to yell at Chen for saying those ominous words, afraid of revealing his uneasiness.

"Where's the Chief Master? We'd better report this to him fast," a man's urgent voice floated in from the outside. "The demon is so vicious, what...what can we do?" another voice asked timidly.

"I am over here! What's going on?" Lin Zhennan shouted loudly towards them, who, in turn, rushed over. It was an escort, followed by three henchmen.

"Chief Master, not a single escort we sent out made it back," the leading escort said.

Lin Zhennan had expected news of someone's death when he heard the commotion. But he had sent out a total of twenty-three escorts and henchmen to gather information last night; how could all of them have been wiped out?

"Well, are you sure they're dead?" he asked hurriedly. "Maybe they're still investigating and just haven't gotten back in time."

The escort shook his head. "We have already found seventeen bodies...."

"Seventeen bodies?" Lin Zhennan and Lin Pingzhi cried out in unison.

Fear written all over his face, the escort confirmed with a nod. "Yes, seventeen bodies. Among them were Escorts Fu,

Qian, and Wu. All of the bodies are in the Front Hall at this very moment.”

Without saying another word, Lin Zhennan hurried to the Front Hall. All the tables and chairs in the hall had been moved against the walls, and seventeen bodies lay on the floor in no particular order. Although Lin Zhennan was not a novice in handling difficult situations, when he took in the horrible scene in front of him, his hands could not help trembling and his knees almost gave out.

“Why...Why...Why?” he muttered, his voice so dry that the others could barely hear him.

“Alas, Escort Gao was an honest and diligent man; who’d expect that the demon would not spare him, either.” Voices came from outside the Front Hall, and seconds later, five neighbors walked into the front hall, carrying a door plank. A dead body lay on top of it.

“When I opened my door this morning, I saw him lying dead in the middle of the street,” one of the neighbors explained. “I recognized him as Escort Gao from your Escort House. I figured he probably had some kind of plague, so I asked a couple of neighbors to help me carry him back to your Escort House.”

“Many thanks! Many thanks!” Lin Zhennan cupped his hands<sup>17</sup> and bowed. Turning toward a henchman standing by the side, he instructed, “Give three taels of silver to each of these wonderful neighbors. You can go to the bookkeeper to get the money.”

Frightened by all the dead bodies in the hall, the neighbors thanked Lin Zhennan and hurried away, and before long, the bodies of four more escorts were sent back. Lin Zhennan counted the bodies which totaled twenty-two in all. Escort Chu’s was the only one not among them, but it might not be long before his body was found somewhere.

Lin Zhennan walked back to the East Hall. Pouring a cup of hot tea for himself, he tried to calm down, but that didn’t help. Still feeling completely dumbfounded, he walked out

the gate and looked around. The stumps of the two broken flagpoles had been taken away, but he found himself even more disturbed. The foes had killed over twenty people in the Escort House, but had never actually shown themselves; they never formally announced their intentions, nor did they reveal their true identities. He turned around and glared at the big sign bearing the golden words "Fortune Prestige Escort House," thinking, "The Fortune Prestige Escort House has been renowned for decades. Will it come to ruin in my hands?" Then he heard the sound of hoof beats approaching from the street. A horse slowly trotted toward the Escort House, and a man lay slumped back on the saddle. Lin Zhennan walked to the horse, and he wasn't surprised to see that it was Escort Chu. The enemy must have killed him and just left the body on the horse. The horse remembered the way home and came back, all by itself.

Lin Zhennan let out a deep sigh as tears poured down his face and fell on the body of Escort Chu. "Brother Chu," he murmured as he carried the body into the hall, "if I can't avenge you, I'd rather die. Why...why did you leave so hurriedly without even telling us the name of your killer?"

Escort Chu was just a regular escort in the Escort House, and not particularly close to Lin Zhennan. Lin Zhennan's tears were shed more out of frustration than from the sadness of losing a friend.

Madam Wang stood in front of the hall holding her golden saber in her left hand. Pointing at the courtyard with her right hand, she shouted challengingly.

"You cursed murderers! Why are you hiding yourselves and sneaking around? If you are real men, I dare you to come to the Fortune Prestige Escort House and fight a real fight. Aren't you afraid of being looked down with all of this sneaking around?"

"Did you see anything?" Lin Zhennan asked his wife in a whisper as he placed Escort Chu's body down on the ground.

“No, I didn’t see anything,” Madam Wang growled. “These rotten lowlifes must be frightened of our Lin Family’s seventy-two moves of the Evil-Resisting Sword Art.” She waved the saber in the air and continued, “They are frightened of the golden saber in my hand, too!”

Suddenly, a snickering sound rose from a corner of the roof, and then with a hiss of wind, an object zipped through the air and struck the spine of the golden saber. Madam Wang felt a shock run through her arm and she had to let go of the weapon. The saber flew into the air and landed in the middle of the courtyard.

Wasting no time, Lin Zhennan unsheathed his sword and jumped up onto the roof, and with a move called “Cast Upon Demons,” the tip of his sword danced like the scatter of falling petals and flew toward the origin of the attack. Having not been able to face his enemies, he found his anger growing over the past couple of days and it now reached the point of explosion. Sparing no strength, he attacked with full force. But the attack hit nothing. The corner of the roof was completely empty; there wasn’t even a shadow. He jumped onto the roof of the east room, but found no one there either.

Madam Wang and Lin Pingzhi also jumped up onto the roof with their weapons drawn. Filled with fury, Madam Wang snarled.

“Damn you! You son of a dog! Be a man; come out and fight. Are you scared? What kind of shameless cowards are you?”

“Where did that son of a dog go? Who was he?” she asked Lin Zhennan.

Lin Zhennan shook his head. “Keep your voice down,” he whispered.

The three searched the entire roof and then jumped back down to the courtyard.

“What hit your saber?” Lin Zhennan asked in a low voice.

“Damn that son of a dog! I don’t know,” Madam Wang snapped.

They searched the courtyard but could find neither darts nor other missiles. The only thing they were able to find were small grains of bricks spread over the floor under the osmanthus tree. Obviously the attacker had hit Madam Wang's saber with just a small piece of brick, and it was quite frightening to imagine that such a small piece of brick could have carried such great power. Seeing the fragments of brick, Madam Wang stopped cursing. Her anger was quenched, and completely replaced with fear. She froze for a moment, and then walked silently into the room.

After her husband and son entered, Madam Wang shut the door behind them. "The enemy is too skillful. We're not in the same class. What...what shall we...?" she whispered nervously.

"We can ask for help from friends. It's perfectly normal for people to help each other in a time of need," Lin Zhennan replied.

"We have many true friends that we can trust, but how many of them can fight better than we can? The ones that are no better than us won't be of any help anyway," Madam Wang questioned.

"Yes, you are right," Lin Zhennan admitted, "but the more people, the more brain power. It might not be a bad idea to ask them for ideas."

"Fine! Who do you think we should ask?" Madam Wang asked.

"Let's get friends who live close by first," Lin Zhennan suggested. "I will transfer all the elite fighters from our Escort Houses in Hangzhou, Nanchang and Guangzhou here, and also invite famous Kung-Fu masters in our province and the neighboring three provinces."

"Don't you think that would hurt the reputation of the Fortune Prestige Escort House?" Madam Wang frowned.

"Wife, you are thirty-nine years old this year, right?" Lin Zhennan suddenly asked out of the blue.

“Why are you suddenly asking about my age? I was born in the year of the Tiger;<sup>18</sup> don’t you remember how old I am?” Madam Wang spat at him.

“I’ll be sending out invitations for your fortieth birthday party...,” Lin Zhennan said when Madam Wang quickly cut him short grouchily.

“Why the hell are you so interested in seeing me get a year older? You think I’m not old enough already?”

“You’re not old at all! You don’t even have a single gray hair.” Lin Zhennan shook his head. “I am using your fortieth birthday as an excuse, so when we invite relatives and friends over, we won’t arouse any suspicion. When everybody arrives, we shall only tell our close friends the true story, then there will be no damage to our reputation,” he explained.

Madam Wang thought about it for a while and finally agreed. “Very well! It is your decision. But what do I get for a birthday present?”

“A big one! Let’s have a cute, fat, baby boy next year!” Lin Zhennan whispered in her ear.

“Bah, you old goat! Still talking nonsense in such a crisis.” Madam Wang’s face went scarlet, and she spat at her husband half in annoyance.

Lin Zhennan grinned, and then left for the bookkeeper’s office so he could arrange to have the invitations sent out. The joke was just to ease his wife’s fear; he, himself, was still deeply worried. “Water a mile away can not put out a fire at hand. Terrible things will most probably happen again in the Escort House this very night. When our friends arrive, there might not be a Fortune Prestige Escort House waiting for them,” he thought to himself.

When Lin Zhennan arrived at the door of the bookkeeper’s office, he was greeted by two very frightened servants.

“Chief...Chief...Chief Master...something horrible... horrible has happened,” one of them mumbled in a trembling

voice,

"What's the matter?" Lin Zhennan asked.

"Bookkeeper Mr. Dong just sent Lin Fu to go buy some coffins, and right...right after he turned the corner on East Street, he fell to the ground dead," said the servant fearfully.

"What? Where's the body?"

"Still lying on the street."

"Go bring the body back here," Lin Zhennan directed. "Now, our enemies are becoming more reckless. They even dare to commit murder in broad daylight, and right in the middle of the street," he thought inwardly.

"Yes, sir...yes, sir...!" the two servants answered, but neither of them moved an inch.

"Well?" Lin Zhennan roared.

"Chief Master, you'd better go have...have a look...at...."

Lin Zhennan knew something bizarre must have just happened again. He gave a snort and walked toward the gate. Three escorts and five henchmen were already there. They stared through the gate, all looking very frightened.

"What's going on?" Lin Zhennan demanded, and then saw for himself before anybody had a chance to answer. At about ten paces from the gate, an inch-wide line was drawn on the stone slab street in blood. Words also written in blood next to the line read, "Cross the Line and Die."

"When was this drawn? Did anyone see who did it?" asked Lin Zhennan immediately.

"Earlier, when Lin Fu died on East Street, everybody was crowding around him to see what was happening. There was no one here. I don't know who would do such a thing," an escort answered.

Lin Zhennan raised his voice and said loudly, "I, Lin Zhennan, am tired of living; I'd like to see how I'm going to die, after I cross this line." He strode out of the gate.

"Chief Master!" Two of the escorts cried out.

Lin Zhennan waved them off and stepped over the line. The blood used to draw the line and the words was still wet.

He scuffed the words out with the bottom of his shoes and then went back through the gate.

"This is just an attempt to scare us," he said to the three escorts. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Brothers, would you please first go to the coffin shop, and then make a visit to the Heavenly-Peace Temple in the west end of town to have the monks come over for a mass to calm the souls, deliver them from purgatory, and drive away the evil spirits?"

The three escorts watched the Chief Master stepping over the bloody line with their own eyes. Seeing that no harm had befallen him, they were quite relieved. After getting their weapons, they walked out the gate side by side. Lin Zhennan watched them stepping over the bloody line and rounding the corner of the street. He waited a little bit longer and then went back into the house.

Walking into the bookkeeper's office, Lin Zhennan said to Bookkeeper Huang, "Mr. Huang, will you please write some invitations to some relatives and friends for a wine party in honor of my wife's birthday?"

"Of course, sir! And which day would that be?" Bookkeeper Huang asked.

Suddenly, sounds of running steps came from outside. A man rushed in through the gate. Lin Zhennan stuck his head out and heard a loud thud. Someone had fallen. Hurrying to the place where the sound came from, Lin Zhennan saw Escort Di, one of the three escorts he just sent to the coffin shop, laying on the ground. He was barely alive.

"Brother Di, are you alright?" Lin Zhennan held him in his arms and asked frantically.

"They're all dead, I...I...I ran back," Escort Di gasped.

"Who did this to you?"

"Don't...don't know...don't know...." Then after a couple of shudders, Escort Di lay still.

Within minutes, everyone in the Escort House heard the news. Madam Wang and Lin Pingzhi both came out and all they heard from the crowd was: "Cross the Line and Die."



"I'll retrieve the bodies of the other two escorts," Lin Zhennan said with determination.

"Chief...Chief Master...you can't go," Bookkeeper Huang muttered. "Great courage brings great rewards. Thirty taels of silver for the one that...that brings the bodies back." He made the announcement three times, but no one answered.

"Where is Pingzhi? Pingzhi? Pingzhi?" Madam Wang suddenly shrieked frantically, her voice filled with fear.

"Young Master! Young Master!" everyone started calling together with Madam Wang.

"I am here!" Lin Pingzhi's voice floated in from outside the gate.

With a surge of relieved happiness, everyone rushed to the gate, and rounding the street corner was Lin Pingzhi, with a body draped over each shoulder – he was carrying back the two dead escorts. With weapons in their hands, Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang both rushed over the bloodline to guard Lin Pingzhi's back.

"What a brave young man the Young Master is! He has great courage!" all the escorts and henchmen cheered, while Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang were both filled with pride for their son.

"Child, that was too reckless. These two escorts were good friends, but they were already dead. It wasn't worth the risk," Madam Wang said reprovingly.

Lin Pingzhi managed a smile, but deep inside, he was miserable. "The whole affair is my fault," he thought to himself. "It is all because I couldn't contain myself and killed that guy; so many people have died because of me. If I only worry about my own life like a coward, how can I bear to ever look at myself again?"

"Unbelievable, Mr. Hua is dead too!" Suddenly shouts came from the back room.

"What happened?" Lin Zhennan shouted as the steward of the Escort House walked out in quick steps.

"Chief Master," the steward said fearfully, "Mr. Hua went out the back door to shop for some vegetables, and he just dropped dead about ten paces out the back door. There are the same...the same words in blood."

Mr. Hua was a cook in the Escort House. His cooking skills were top notch; he was quite famous for his "White-Gourd Pot," "Buddha Over the Wall,"<sup>19</sup> "Pickled Fish," and "Fish-wrap Wonton." He was Lin Zhennan's secret weapon when he wanted to socialize with local officials and rich business owners.

But Hua was just a cook, neither an escort, nor a henchman. It was an unwritten rule that wagon-pullers, sedan-carriers, grooms, and porters were to be left alone when bandits raided escort convoys. With enemies so ruthless, it would probably result in a massacre of the entire Escort House. Lin Zhennan shivered at the thought.

"Don't be afraid." He tried to calm everyone. "Humph, these damn bandits only have the guts to attack when one is off guard. You've all seen the Young Master, Madam Wang, and I step across the line. What did those damn thugs do? Nothing? They dared do nothing."

Everybody agreed obsequiously, yet no one dared to step out of the gate. Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang frowned at each other and neither had any idea what to do.

That night Lin Zhennan scheduled the escorts to guard the Escort House, but when he checked upon them, he found no one on duty. All the escorts just huddled within the hall. When they saw the Chief Master, all stood up looking embarrassed, yet no one wanted to move. Lin Zhennan knew that the enemy was just too vicious, and after the deaths of so many people, he still had not come up with a solution. No wonder everyone was so scared. So he uttered a few words of comfort, ordered servants to bring wine and dishes to the hall, and then drank together with the escorts. Greatly worried, each one just drank the wine silently, and no one

talked much. Not long after, many became drunk and fell asleep.

The following noon, several horses suddenly thundered out of the Escort House. After a short investigation, Lin Zhennan found that five escorts simply could not bear the stress and had fled without notice. He shook his head and sighed.

“When trouble comes, each bird will fly in its own direction. I can no longer take care of each of you, brothers. If you feel like leaving, please go ahead,” he declared.

Some escorts started berating the five for lack of loyalty, while some others kept their silence and only sighed. They were probably wishing that they had fled as well.

Near dusk, five horses came back with five bodies. The five escorts, who wanted to escape, only ended up losing their lives before everyone else.

Lin Pingzhi was enraged. Sword in hands, he dashed out of the gate and stood three paces beyond the line of blood, yelling, “A true man should take full responsibility for his own actions. I, Lin Pingzhi, killed Yu from Sichuan. It has nothing to do with anyone else. If you want your revenge, come to me. Stab me through the heart and slice me up! I won’t complain. But you keep killing innocent people; what kind of monster does something like that? Lin Pingzhi stands before you. Come and kill me if you dare! If you are too scared to come out, then you are just a pack of craven weaklings; you son of a dog.” The sound of his voice escalated, becoming louder and louder. Tearing open his shirt and exposing his body, he pounded his own chest, shouting, “Come out and put your knife right through here! I am a real man and I am not afraid of death! Why are you so scared to stand in front of me face to face? You damn cowards! You filthy monsters!” His eyes turned red from anger as he struck his own chest heavily.

Many bystanders watched him from far away, but no one wanted to come near the Escort House. Hearing their son

shouting, Lin Zhennan and his wife both rushed out of the gate. Their anger and frustration had been steadily building over the last couple of days. The anger finally exploded, and they too began to pour streams of abuse at their unknown enemies.

The escorts looked at each other with admiration for the courage of the three. They felt no surprise that their Chief Master and his wife would shout defiance at their enemies, since the Chief Master was an outstanding man and Madame was a brave woman, but the Young Master looked as fragile as a girl, making him seem that much more heroic for his fearlessness.

The three shouted for a good long while, but were only rewarded with silence.

“‘Cross the Line and Die?’ I just crossed the line, what are you going to do?” Lin Pingzhi yelled out loud. He walked across the line again and stood straight with pride, sword in hand.

“Yes, yes. These damn thugs only bully the weak but fear the strong. They don’t even have the guts to come and face my son,” Madam Wang said to Lin Pingzhi tenderly. She grabbed his hand and dragged him back through the gate.

Lin Pingzhi was still trembling with fiery anger. After going back to the bedroom, he could no longer hold back his tears. Bending over the bed, he started to cry.

“Son, you are very brave. You are a true man of the Lin family. There’s nothing we can do if the enemy doesn’t have the guts to face us openly. Why don’t you go take a rest?” Lin Zhennan patted him on the head, trying to comfort him, but Lin Pingzhi continued to cry until he finally dozed off.

After dinner, Lin Pingzhi overheard his parents talking. It was something about some escorts who were talking about digging a tunnel out from the back garden. This way, they could escape without crossing the line of blood. If they were trapped in the Escort House, all of them would die, sooner or later.

"If they want to dig a tunnel out, let them," Madam Wang sniffed, "but I am afraid...afraid that...Humph!"

Lin Zhennan and Lin Pingzhi both understood what she meant. The escorts would most likely end up just like the five escorts who tried to ride away – losing their lives earlier, rather than later.

"Why don't I go have a look? If it really works, then it might be a good way for all the escorts and henchmen to escape," Lin Zhennan said. He went out, but soon returned, saying, "They were just talking about it, but no one really dared to dig."

That night, the three went to bed very early. Everyone in the Escort House had resigned themselves to their fates, and no one cared to stand guard for the night.

Lin Pingzhi slept till about midnight, when he suddenly felt somebody patting his shoulder. He jumped up and instantly reached for the sword under his pillow. Then he heard his mother's voice.

"Pingzhi, it's me. Your father has been gone for a good while and still hasn't returned. Let's go look for him."

"Where did Dad go?" Lin Pingzhi asked in surprise.

"I don't know!" Madam Wang replied.

The two grabbed their weapons and walked out of the room. They first peeked into the big hall, only to find that it was filled with candlelight and a dozen gambling escorts. Everyone had his heart in his throat for the last couple of days; finally realizing there was really nothing to do to improve the situation, they just stopped worrying about their safety. Madam Wang gestured Lin Pingzhi to follow her, and then left.

Mother and son looked everywhere, but still couldn't find Lin Zhennan. They became more and more worried, but were afraid to alert the household. The news of the Chief Master's disappearance at a time when everyone was scared to death would be disastrous. The situation would be completely out of control.

The two searched all the way to the rear of the Escort House, when Lin Pingzhi suddenly heard a faint noise coming from the armory to the left. Fluttering candlelight shone from behind the window. Walking quietly to the window, he poked a hole in the paper<sup>20</sup> with his fingertip, and looked inside; then he called out happily.

“Dad, there you are!”

Lin Zhennan was hunched over something shielded by his body. When he heard the call, he turned his head back. Lin Pingzhi’s smile froze when he saw the terrified expression on his father’s face. His heart started thumping hard, and he just froze there, mouth wide open.

Madam Wang pushed the door open and went in. There was blood everywhere. Three benches were put together side by side and a body lay across them. The body was completely stripped, and the chest and belly were cut open. Madam Wang looked at the face and recognized it as Escort Huo, one of the five escorts who rode away and then was carried back dead. Lin Pingzhi walked in and closed the door behind him.

Removing the bloody heart from the chest cavity and holding it in his hand, Lin Zhennan exclaimed, “The heart was crushed to pieces. Just as I expected, it was...it was....”

Madam Wang completed the sentence for him, “It was the “Heart Crushing Palm” technique of the Qingcheng Sword School!”

Lin Zhennan nodded and then lowered his head in silence.

By then Lin Pingzhi finally understood that his father was performing an autopsy on the body to try to determine the cause of death.

Lin Zhennan put the heart back into its cavity, wrapped the body with oilskin, and then placed it in a corner. He wiped the blood off his hands with the oilskin and went back to the bedroom with his wife and son.

"The enemy is definitely an elite master hand from the Qingcheng Sword School. Wife, what do you think we should do?" he asked.

"The whole trouble started because of me, I'll go challenge him to a fight. If I can't win, then just let him kill me," Lin Pingzhi bellowed.

Lin Zhennan shook his head. "This person can crush someone's heart into pieces with a single hit without leaving any sign of damage to the body. His Kung Fu skills are remarkable. He must be a first-class master in the Qingcheng Sword School. If he had wanted to kill you, you'd be dead long ago. I think he is being deliberately cruel. He's not just simply going to kill us."

"What does he want?" Lin Pingzhi asked.

"He wants to play with us, like a cat plays with mice. He wants to see us squirm, until we are all frightened to death, and that's when he will be satisfied," Lin Zhennan answered.

"Humph, how dare this son of a dog show such disrespect to our Fortune Prestige Escort House," Lin Pingzhi barked.

"He is surely looking down upon the Fortune Prestige Escort House," Lin Zhennan stated.

"Perhaps, he is afraid of the seventy-two moves of Father's Evil-Resisting Sword Art. Otherwise, why does he not dare fight face to face with Father, and only sneaks around, stabbing people in the back?"

"Pingzhi," Lin Zhennan said as he shook his head slightly. "Your father's Evil-Resisting Sword Art is well and fine for dealing with regular gangsters. But this man's Heart Crushing Palm Kung Fu is much better than mine. I...I don't normally give up so easily, but after seeing Escort Huo's heart, I...I...well...."

Seeing the dark expression that clouded his father's face, Lin Pingzhi did not say another word.

"Since the enemy is so powerful, a real man should be ready to swallow his pride, so why don't we just hide from him for a little while," Madam Wang suggested.

"That's what I have in mind, too," Lin Zhennan nodded.

"Let's head out to Luoyang tonight," Madam Wang said. "Fortunately, we know who the enemy is now. It is never too late for revenge, even if we have to wait for ten years."

"That's right! Father-in-law has friends all over. He will be able to come up with a solution. Let's pack now and we'll leave right away," Lin Zhennan said.

"If we leave, who's going to take care of the people in the Escort House?" Lin Pingzhi asked.

"The enemy has no score to settle with them. After we leave, all the others in the Escort House will actually be safer," Lin Zhennan explained.

Lin Pingzhi thought to himself, "That's very true! The enemy has killed so many people in the Escort House, all because of me. After I leave, the enemy will just leave all the escorts and henchmen alone." So he went back to his room to pack. He looked at all his robes and toys; afraid that the foes might just burn the Escort House to the ground, he could not bear to part with any of them. So even after he had packed two big bags, he still felt that there were too many things left behind. He picked up a jade horse statue on the table with his left hand, and then grabbed a leopard fur with his right hand, a fur that was skinned from a leopard he himself had killed. Carrying all the bags, he strode into his parents' room.

When Madam Wang saw him, she couldn't help grinning.

"We are escaping, not moving. What are you going to do with all this stuff?" she asked amusedly.

Lin Zhennan sighed and shook his head, thinking to himself, "Although we've been a Martial Arts family for generations, our son is so used to living in ease and comfort that except for the Kung Fu he has learned, he is no different from any rich, profligate son. Now, when a sudden misfortune has forced us to run away in a hurry, how can I blame him?" Love and tender affection welled up in his heart, and he could not help but try to comfort his son.



“Grandfather’s house has everything you need. Don’t bring so much stuff. All we need to bring is enough silver, gold, and valuable jewelry. On our way, we’ll be passing by our Escort House branches in Jiangxi, Hunan and Hubei. Do you think that we have to beg the whole way? The lighter the pack, the better. The less you carry, the easier it is to move about when you fight.”

At those words, Lin Pingzhi had no choice but to put down the packages.

“Which way shall we take, dashing out the front gate or sneaking out from the back?” Madam Wang asked.

But Lin Zhennan didn’t answer. He sat down in the armchair, closed his eyes and began smoking his pipe. A while later, he opened his eyes.

“Pingzhi, go tell everyone in the Escort House to pack their belongings and get ready to leave by dawn tomorrow morning. Ask the bookkeepers to distribute money to them. After the plague is over, we’ll all come back.”

“Yes, Father!” Lin Pingzhi answered, feeling a bit surprised that his father had changed his mind all of a sudden.

“Are you asking everybody to just break up in chaos? Who’s going to watch the Escort House then?” Madam Wang was also confused.

“There’s no need to watch the house anymore. This is a condemned house, haunted by demons. Who would dare come in? After we leave, who do you think would remain?” Lin Zhennan explained.

Lin Pingzhi went out to spread the message. Not long after, the whole Escort House was filled with commotion. Lin Zhennan waited until Lin Pingzhi left, and then spoke again.

“Wife, tomorrow Pingzhi and I will change into henchman’s clothes, and you can disguise yourself as a maid. At dawn, over a hundred people will rush out and disperse at the same time; no matter how fierce the enemies

are, they only have two or three people at most, and won't know whom to pursue."

"Great idea!" Madam Wang applauded. She went out, and soon came back with two sets of dirty henchman garments, so when Lin Pingzhi came back, he and his father could put them on. She, herself, had changed into a set of dark blue clothes, with a piece of handkerchief decorated with blue flowers covering her hair. Now, except for her extremely white skin color, she looked just like an ordinary maid. Lin Pingzhi also changed into the henchman clothes. They stank terribly, but he had no other choice.

At dawn, Lin Zhennan had the gate opened and addressed all who had gathered in the court, "This year has not been a good year for us. We've suffered plagues and have been haunted by demons in the Escort House. I guess we'll just have to stay away for a while. All brothers who still want to remain in the escorting business please go to Hangzhou and Nancang to join our Zhejiang and Jiangxi branch Escort Houses. Escort Liu and Escort Yi there will treat you well. Now let us go!"

After these words, all of the over one hundred people present mounted their horses and rushed out the gate. Lin Zhennan locked the gate and, with a howl, ten riders dashed over the bloodline. Everyone was greatly encouraged, and by now, none was as afraid as before; all were thinking the same thought - the earlier they left the Escort House, the safer. So, with the thunder of hoof beats, several rode toward the north gate of the city. Most people did not have any specific plan, so they all followed and headed toward the north gate.

Lin Zhennan signaled his wife and son to stop by the corner of the street. "Let them go north, we shall go south instead," he whispered.

"Isn't Luoyang north from here? Why are we going south?" Madam Wang could not understand.

"The enemy probably has guessed where we are heading to, and have set up an ambush outside the north gate. But, if

we go south instead, and then make a turn later to go back north, the ambush will not work,” Lin Zhennan explained.

“Father!” Lin Pingzhi suddenly called out.

“What is it, son?” Lin Zhennan asked, but Lin Pingzhi did not say anything more. After a little while he called again, “Father!”

“What do you want to say, just speak out,” Madam Wang encouraged him.

“I still want to go out from the north gate,” Lin Pingzhi declared. “These damn monsters have killed so many of our people, if we don’t fight them to the death, how can we vent our anger?”

“Of course we will get our revenge. But with your skill level, can you defeat his ‘Heart Crushing Palm’?” asked Madam Wang rhetorically.

“So what! At most I’ll just get killed like Escort Huo with my heart crushed in pieces!” Lin Pingzhi rebuffed her.

Lin Zhennan’s face turned livid with anger. “If all the three generations of our Lin family had acted as recklessly as you, the Fortune Prestige Escort House would have collapsed by itself, saving our enemies the trouble,” he bellowed.

Lin Pingzhi did not dare say another word, and just followed his parents quietly. They kept heading south, until they were well out of town, and then turned southwest. After crossing the Min River, they arrived at a small town, Nanyu. They continued the trip for half a day without stopping anywhere. When they finally needed a respite, it was already past noon.

Seeing a small restaurant by the road, they decided to stop and have something to eat. Lin Zhennan told the waiter to bring whatever was available and that the food should be prepared as fast as possible. The waiter took the order and left, but after a long while, there was still no food forthcoming.

“Waiter, hurry up!” Lin Zhennan yelled, wanting to resume their trip as fast as possible. He yelled one more time,

but there was still no response.

Madam Wang started calling out as well, "Waiter, waiter...." Still no response.

Jumping up from her seat, Madam Wang drew the golden saber out from her pack. Gripping it tightly in her hand, she ran to the back room, only to find the waiter lying prone on the ground. There was also a woman lying draped over the threshold. Madam Wang put her finger near the waiter's nostrils and found that he was not breathing. She felt the lips of the body. They were still warm.

By then, Lin Zhennan and Lin Pingzhi had already drawn their swords and started checking the surroundings of the small restaurant. The restaurant stood next to a hill all by itself, adjacent to a small forest, with no other shop or neighbor nearby. The trio stood in front of the restaurant and gazed into the distance in all directions, but there was nothing unusual at all.

Lin Zhennan held his sword in front of him and started shouting in a loud voice.

"Friends of the Qingcheng Sword School, Lin Zhennan is right here awaiting his destiny. Please show yourselves."

He called out several times, but was only answered by his own echoes, "Show yourselves...show yourselves...!" The trio knew that their enemies were watching close by. This was obviously the spot where they had decided to make their attack. All three of them gasped nervously, but knowing that everything would soon be over, one way or the other, they also felt a sense of relief and were able to regain some sense of calm.

"Lin Pingzhi stands before you! Come and get me! You filthy scoundrels! I know you're too scared to show yourselves. All you can do is to sneak around, like thieving pickpockets!" Lin Pingzhi yelled.

Suddenly, laughter shot toward them from the woods. Lin Pingzhi only had enough time to take in a glimpse of a blurry shadow, before finding a man standing right in front of him.

He did not even bother to take a good look at the man before thrusting his sword toward the man's chest, using the move called "Attack Straight to the Heart." The man turned to one side and dodged the attack. Lin Pingzhi changed the thrust to a slash to the side. The man sneered and stepped around to Lin Pingzhi's left. Lin Pingzhi struck with his left hand and then thrust the sword back.

Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang both had their weapons in hand and were about to jump in to help, but after seeing the well-arranged series of moves Lin Pingzhi had put together, they both stepped back. Lin Pingzhi appeared to be very calm and well organized while fighting such a tough enemy. The man wore a purple robe and had a sword hanging at his waist. He seemed to be about twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, and disdain was written all over his long face.

Lin Pingzhi could no longer keep his anger under control. He chopped and stabbed and slashed and diced using the "Evil-Resisting Sword Art" recklessly, not worrying about his own safety. The man just moved around, dodging attacks without bothering to draw his own sword or fight back. After Lin Pingzhi had used about twenty different moves or so, the man finally sneered.

"Is this the vaunted 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'? How mediocre!"

He flicked the sword with his finger, and there was a reverberating ring. Lin Pingzhi felt a sharp pain between his thumb and index finger, and could no longer hold on to his sword. The sword fell to the ground and before he knew it, the man had thrown a sidekick at him, which knocked him down and sent him rolling across the ground. Immediately, Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang rushed over and stood side by side to shield their son behind them.

"What's your name? Are you from the Qingcheng Sword School?" Lin Zhennan demanded.

“With the paltry skills of your Fortune Prestige Escort House, you aren’t worthy to know my name. But, since I am here for revenge today, I’ll make an exception. You’re right, I am from the Qingcheng Sword School,” the man said haughtily.

Lin Zhennan pointed his sword to the ground and then cupped his hands in a formal greeting. “I have always held Master Yu of the Pine-Wind Temple in the highest regard,” he said. “Every year I’ve sent escorts to the Qingcheng Sword School with gifts and have never deigned to be impolite in any way. This year, Master Yu has even sent four apprentices to Fuzhou. I wonder how we have offended you.”

The man rolled his eyes and sneered. After a long while he finally replied, “You are correct! My Master did send four apprentices to Fuzhou, and I am one of them.”

“Excellent! What is your honorable name then?” Lin Zhennan asked again.

The young man seemed disinclined to answer the question, but with a sniff, he stated, “My surname is Yu, I am Yu Renhao.”

“‘Ying Xiong Hao Jie, the Four Aces of Qingcheng.’<sup>21</sup> You are one of the four great apprentices of the Pine-Wind Temple,” Lin Zhennan said with a nod, “no wonder your ‘Heart Crushing Palm’ technique is so powerful, capable of killing without drawing blood. Impressive!! Very impressive!! Mr. Yu has come such a long way to visit, and Lin Zhennan did not greet him properly; our lack of manners is unforgivable.”

“The ‘Heart Crushing Palm’ technique...humph...you did not greet us, but that Kung Fu master son of yours sure did. He even killed my Master’s beloved son. Yes, quite a show of manners,” Yu Renhao spoke with dead seriousness.

A cold shiver ran up Lin Zhennan’s spine. He knew that if his son had only killed a normal apprentice of the Qingcheng Sword School, then he could ask a well-respected member of the Martial World to intervene and arrange for a formal

apology to the Qingcheng Sword School, which might have solved the problem. But if the victim were really the son of the Pine-Wind Temple Master Yu Canghai, there would no longer be any alternative, except to fight until one side or the other was completely annihilated. He waved his sword and let out a couple of laughs.

“Funny, very funny! Young Hero Yu, you have told a good joke!”

“Who’s joking?” Yu Renhao replied coldly with raised eyebrow.

“I have long admired Master Yu for his amazing Kung Fu skills and his strict discipline with his students,” Lin Zhennan said. “In fact, everyone in the Martial World feels the same way. However, the person my son killed was just a punk who was harassing an innocent girl in a wine shop. Since my son was able to kill him, one can easily tell that his Kung Fu skills must have been very limited. How could such a person possibly be Master Yu’s son? Thus, I conclude that the Young Hero Yu must be joking?”

Presented with this line of logic, Yu Renhao was at a loss for words.

Suddenly another voice came from the woods, “There is an old saying: ‘Two fists cannot parry four hands.’ In that tiny wine shop, your Young Master Lin and twenty-four escorts ambushed my junior apprentice brother Yu...!” The speaker walked out as he spoke. He had a small head and waved a folding fan casually. He continued, “If it was a fair fight, then there’s not much to talk about. To be frank, even if the Fortune Prestige Escort House had a lot more people, it wouldn’t have made any difference. But your Young Master Lin not only poisoned junior apprentice brother Yu’s wine, but also shot seventeen different kinds of toxic projectiles at him. Humph, this son of a turtle is so treacherous. We came to visit in good will, and never expected to be greeted with an ambush.”

“What is your honorable name?” Lin Zhennan asked coldly.

“No honorable name at all. I am Fang Renzhi,” the man answered.

By then, Lin Pingzhi had picked up his sword and had been standing angrily by the side, waiting for his father to finish the conversation, before jumping in to fight once again. But when he heard all of the nonsense from Fang Renzhi, he couldn’t help but shout angrily, “That is completely false! I had no grievance with him; I’ve never even met him before; I didn’t know that he was from the Qingcheng Sword School; why would I want to harm him?”

“Bull, bull! Stinking lies!” Fang Renzhi shook his head. “If you did not have ill feelings toward my junior apprentice brother Yu, why did you hide some thirty escorts and henchmen outside the little shop then? My junior apprentice brother Yu saw you harassing that innocent girl, so he knocked you down to teach you a lesson. He spared your life, but not only were you ungrateful, you instructed all those damn escorts to attack my junior apprentice brother Yu at once.”

Lin Pingzhi felt as if his lungs were going to explode with rage. “Is everyone from the Qingcheng Sword School a rascal who lies through his teeth?” he snarled.

“The son of a turtle says we’re liars!” Fang Renzhi said with a big grin.

“I said that. So what?” Lin Pingzhi retorted angrily.

“Continue to do so, it doesn’t matter to me.” Fang Renzhi nodded.

Lin Pingzhi was surprised. These words were completely unexpected. Suddenly he heard a “swoosh” and realized that somebody was jumping toward him. He hurriedly struck out with his left palm but was still one step too slow. With the sound of flesh against flesh, he was slapped hard across the right cheek. Sparkles began to swirl in front of his eyes; he almost passed out.



Fang Renzhi retreated back to where he was standing after his lightning quick attack. Putting his hand on his own right cheek, he yelled angrily, "Punk, what did you hit me for? Ouch, it hurts! Ha-ha."

Seeing her son being humiliated, Madam Wang jumped forth and swung her saber at the man. This was a move called "Wild Fire Burning the Sky." Her attack was steady and vicious. The man jumped out of the way and the blade missed his right arm by a mere four inches.

"Damn bitch!" the man cursed, completely shocked. Not daring to take his opponent lightly, he drew his sword and deflected another of Madam Wang's strikes.

"If the Qingcheng Sword School wants to get rid of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, that's easy; but as to who is right and who is wrong, the Martial World will definitely be the judge of that. Young Sir Yu, if you please!" Lin Zhennan saluted Yu with his sword.

Yu Renhao pressed on his sheath, and the sword jumped out of the sheath with a ring of steel. "Chief Master Lin, after you!"

Lin Zhennan thought to himself, "I've long heard that the Pine-Wind Sword Art of the Qingcheng Sword School is both sturdy and light. They say that it is as sturdy as the pine and as light as the wind. I must try to control the initiative for a chance to win." At that thought, he started his attack immediately. After thrusting the sword toward the enemy as a feint, he swiped his sword sideways. This was one move of the "Evil-Resisting Sword Art" called "Keep Away Evil." Seeing the ferocity of the blow, Yu Renhao dodged out of the way. Lin Zhennan did not wait to complete the move; he immediately followed up with another move - "Eye-Picking Zhong Kui,"<sup>22</sup> the point of his sword shot straight toward his opponent's eyes, and as soon as Yu Renhao jumped back from the tip of the sword, his third attack immediately followed. Yu Renhao raised his sword and blocked the thrust with a clash of metal. Both felt the impact in their arms.

"I thought the Kung Fu of the Qingcheng Sword School was really something," Lin Zhennan thought, "but it seems to be only average. With this level of skill, how could he possibly perform the powerful 'Heart Crushing Palm'? He must have another powerful helper around." With this realization, his heart pumped even faster.

Yu Renhao turned his sword around and stabbed at Lin Zhennan, directing his attack at seven different parts of Lin Zhennan's body almost simultaneously. The thrusts were so fast that it seemed as though the air between them had suddenly been filled with the flickers of silver stars. Lin Zhennan's counter attack was just as fast, working hard to control the initiative. The two fought back and forth, and after over twenty moves, they were still at a standstill.

At the other end, the fight between Madam Wang and Fang Renzhi turned out to be a totally different story. Madam Wang's golden saber was simply no match for the incredible speed of her opponent's attacks; it was already a miracle how she managed several narrow escapes. Seeing his mother on the verge of losing, Lin Pingzhi hurriedly joined in. He swung his sword downward at Fang Renzhi's head. Fang Renzhi moved aside and dodged the attack. Lin Pingzhi lunged forth again like a madman. Suddenly, he tripped on something. Losing his balance completely, he fell flat on his face. "Stay down!" he heard somebody yell, and then he felt a foot pressing down heavily on his back in addition to the sharp prick of a blade. All he could see was the dirt on the ground. He heard his mother screaming, "Don't kill him! Don't kill him!" Then he heard Fang Renzhi yelling, "You lie down, too."

What actually happened was that when Lin Pingzhi and his mother were fighting Fang Renzhi, a third man had sneaked in from behind and swept Lin Pingzhi with his leg, causing him to stumble. He then pulled out a dagger and placed it right at Lin Pingzhi's heart. Madam Wang was already having a hard time defending herself. With this distraction, she started panicking, and her moves became

careless. It became easy for Fang Renzhi to elbow her in the ribs and knock her off her feet.

Fang Renzhi quickly sealed their acupoints.<sup>23</sup> The man who tripped Lin Pingzhi was none other than Jia, who had fought against the two escorts in the small wine shop outside of Fuzhou.

Seeing both his wife and son captured by the enemy, Lin Zhennan also panicked and attacked more desperately. Yu Renhao let out a long laugh and suddenly attacked with several moves that gained him every the initiative in the fight.

"How did this man learn the moves of my 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'?" Lin Zhennan was astonished.

"How's my 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'?" Yu Renhao let out a broad grin.

"How...how...did you learn the Evil-Resisting...?" Lin Zhennan could only stutter.

"What's so great about your 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'? I learned it too," Fang Renzhi started laughing hard. He held his sword and started performing the stances - "Keep Away the Evils," "Eye-Picking Zhong Kui," and "Swallow Flying through the Willow Tree" - all were moves of "Evil-Resisting Sword Art." In that instant, Lin Zhennan was utterly filled with horror. He could never have imagined that his family's very own secret technique, the "Evil-Resisting Sword Art," being performed by his enemies. He was so confused that he completely lost the will to fight.

"Gotcha!" Yu Renhao blurted out as he hit Lin Zhennan's knee. The knee went numb and gave out on Lin Zhennan, forcing him to kneel down. Though he jumped back up immediately, Yu Renhao had already pressed the tip of his sword at Lin's chest.

"Junior apprentice brother Yu, what an excellent display of 'Shooting Star Chasing The Moon'!" Jia Renda cheered loudly. Like the others, "Shooting Star Chasing the Moon"

turned out to be yet another move of the “Evil-Resisting Sword Art.”

“You...you know the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’...okay, just make it quick!” Lin Zhennan heaved a long sigh and dropped his sword. Numbness spread from his back as Fang Renzhi sealed his acupoint with a blow from the pommel of his sword. Then, he heard Fang Renzhi speak again.

“It’s not going to end that easy, you swine! You son of a turtle, wife of a turtle, and grandson of a turtle, the three of you are going to have the exquisite privilege of meeting my Master!”

Jia Renda grabbed Lin Pingzhi, lifted him up by the collar, and slapped him hard on both cheeks.

“You little rascal,” he snarled, “starting this day, I am going to slap you eighteen times a day, from here all the way to Mount Qingcheng. I am going to slap you till your puny little face is changed beyond recognition!”

Filled with hatred, Lin Pingzhi spat at Jia Renda. Because the two were only a foot from each other, Jia Renda had no chance of dodging, and the wad of saliva hit him right on the nose with a wet smack. Jia Renda was furious. He hurled Lin Pingzhi to the ground and began to kick him on his back.

“Enough, enough!” Fang Renzhi restrained Jia with a big grin. “If you kick him to death, how are we going to explain this to the Master? This scum is as fragile as a girl; he can’t handle your punches and kicks.”

Jia Renda’s Kung Fu was just average, but his character was even worse. His Master was never fond of him, and even his fellow apprentices looked down on him. So, when he heard Fang Renzhi’s words, he didn’t dare kick Lin Pingzhi again. Instead, he spat at Lin Pingzhi to vent his anger.

Fang and Yu carried the three members of the Lin family into the small restaurant and threw them onto the floor.

“Let’s eat something first before we start our trip. Junior apprentice Jia, go cook us something, will you?” Fang Renzhi commanded.

"Sure," Jia Renda answered in compliance.

"Senior apprentice brother Fang, we have to be careful not to let these three escape. The old one's Kung Fu isn't half bad; we'll have to figure something out," Yu Renhao mused.

"That's easy!" Fang Renzhi said with a nasty grin. "After we eat, we'll just cut the nerves and tendons in their wrists and ankles. We can thread these three sons of turtles' collarbones with a rope and tie them together, just like a string of crabs. I'll bet you nobody can run away then!"

Lin Pingzhi let loose a torrent of abuse. "If you've got guts, kill the three of us right now. Only dirty lowlife scum would do what you are going to do."

"One more word out of your little rascal's mouth, and I'll find some cow dung or dog crap to stuff your mouth with." Fang Renzhi threatened him with a wolfish grin. These words silenced Lin Pingzhi, although it made him almost pass out with rage. He shut his mouth immediately and did not dare say another word.

"Junior apprentice brother Yu," Fang Renzhi said. "Our Master taught us the seventy-two moves of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art,' and we actually did a good job performing them. As soon as the Chief Master Lin saw those moves, he was scared out of his wits, and his body just gave out on him. Chief Master Lin, I guess you must be wondering at this very moment: How the hell did the Qingcheng Sword School learn the Lin family's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'? Am I right?"

At the moment, that was exactly the question Lin Zhennan was pondering in his head: "How the hell did the Qingcheng Sword School learn the Lin family's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art'?"

# **Chapter 2: Eavesdropping**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The old huqin player walked slowly in front of the short fat man and looked him up and down. "What do you want, old man?" the short fat man demanded in annoyance. "You are talking nonsense!" The old man shook his head and then turned around and walked away. Infuriated, the short fat man stuck his hand out to grab the old man by his scruff.**

Lin Pingzhi wanted more than anything to get up and fight Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao to the death, but with several of his acupoints sealed, he was unable to move any muscle from his lower body. He would become a complete invalid if they were to cut the nerves and tendons of his limbs and thread him through the collarbone, and he would rather die fighting than go through all that pain.

Suddenly, screams sounded from the back kitchen. "Ah... Ah...!" It was a long cry filled with pain, and it was the voice of Jia Renda. Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao both jumped up with their swords drawn and dashed into the kitchen immediately. A shadow flashed by the door, and a person glided in silently, then grabbed Lin Pingzhi by the collar and picked him up. Lin Pingzhi cried out in surprise when he caught a glimpse of the pox-covered face of his rescuer: it belonged to the ugly wine-selling girl, who had caused all this trouble to begin with.

The ugly girl dragged him all the way out the front door. When they reached the big tree where their horses were reined, she grabbed him by the back with her left hand and lifted him up onto the back of the horse. With Lin Pingzhi still in a state of shock, the girl pulled out a sword and swung it swiftly. The blade flashed and the rein was cut free. She prodded the thigh of the horse with her sword; feeling pain, the horse let out an angry neigh, and then pounded madly into the woods.

"Mom! Dad!" Lin Pingzhi shouted. Worrying about his parents and not wanting to run away by himself, he pushed



hard against the back of the horse and fell off. After tumbling some distance on the ground, he found himself deep within some tall bushes. Meanwhile, the horse did not stop running and soon disappeared into the woods.

Holding onto a branch, Lin Pingzhi tried to stand up, only to find that his legs had no strength left in them. After raising himself up about a foot, he fell back into the bushes. His waist and backside were tremendously sore. The soreness must have come from bumping into rocks and tree roots after he fell off the horse.

Then he heard the sound of shouting followed by pounding footsteps – someone must have come after him. In a hurry, Lin Pingzhi lay motionless in the bushes. He could hear the loud clashes of weapons nearby. Several people had started a fierce fight. Quietly, he stuck his head out and watched from the bushes. One group of fighters consisted of Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao of the Qingcheng Sword School. Opposing them were the ugly girl and a man with his face concealed behind a black cloth. Most of his hair was gray, so it was obvious that he was an old man. It didn't take Lin Pingzhi long to conclude that he was the ugly girl's grandfather, old man Sa.

"I thought those two were also from the Qingcheng Sword School," Lin Pingzhi pondered, "but it was actually the girl who rescued me.... Oh! If I had only known that they were both masters of Kung Fu, I wouldn't have risked playing the hero and causing all this trouble for no reason." Then he thought, "Since they are all so busy fighting right this moment, this is the perfect opportunity for me to rescue my father and mother." But the acupoint on his back was still sealed, and his body just wouldn't cooperate.

"Who...who are you? How did you learn the sword skills of the Qingcheng Sword School?" Fang Renzhi cried out in disbelief.

The old man didn't answer. Suddenly, with several blazing flashes, Fang Renzhi's sword flew into the air. Fang

Renzhi immediately jumped backward and Yu Renhao rushed forward to block the attacks. The old man kept pressing on with lightning fast moves.

"You...You...!" Yu Renhao shouted, his voice betraying surprise and fear. With a loud ring, his sword also flew into the air.

The ugly girl jumped forth and lunged, but the old man parried her thrust. "Don't kill him!" he commanded.

"But they're so cruel and killed so many people," the ugly girl argued.

"Let's go!" the old man said. Seeing the hesitation on the ugly girl's face, the old man reminded her, "Don't forget our Master's orders."

"Guess I'll let them off this time," the ugly girl nodded reluctantly, and then left through the small grove of trees. The old man followed her, and before long, both of them disappeared into the woods.

It took Fang and Yu a good while to calm down. They both picked up their own swords.

"Unbelievable! How did he know our Qingcheng sword techniques?" Yu Renhao still could not believe it.

"He only knew a few, but...but when he used the move 'Goose in the Sky,' he did really...really...Ah!" Fang Renzhi had to agree.

"They rescued the Lin boy," Yu Renhao said.

"Let's just hope this isn't a trick to lure us away from the Lin Couple!" Fang Renzhi yelled suddenly.

"Damn!" Yu Renhao cried. The two turned around and rushed back to the restaurant.

A short while later, the sounds of horses moving at a slow trot broke the silence as two horses walked into the woods. Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao each led one of them, and Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang were each tied to a horse. Lin Pingzhi almost shouted out, "Mom! Dad!" Fortunately, he was able to swallow down the words. He knew that if he made any kind of noise, not only would he get himself killed, he would

also ruin any opportunity he had to rescue his parents. Trailing about twenty feet behind the two horses, a man limped along. It turned out to be Jia Renda. The white cloth wrapped around his head was soaked with blood and he was cursing loudly.

“Hell! You sons of turtles took the rabbit boy, but I’ve still got these two old rabbits. I’ll give each of these two old rabbits a good lashing every day. When we arrive at Mount Qingcheng, we’ll see how many lives they have left!”

“Junior apprentice brother Jia!” Fang Renzhi yelled in admonishment. “Master has reminded us over and over to make sure that we capture the Lin couple alive. If any accidents were to befall them, I’d pay to see how many layers of skin Master would peel off you.”

Jia Renda snorted, but shut up instantly.

Lin Pingzhi listened as the Qingcheng disciples walked away, escorting his parents. He was actually slightly relieved after hearing those words.

“They are going to send my parents all the way to Mount Qingcheng, and they won’t give them too hard a time on the way. Fujian is far away from Szechwan. I’ll have to find a way to rescue Father and Mother.”

Then he thought, “When I get to an Escort House branch, I’ll send a message to Grandpa in Luoyang right away.” He lay silently in the bushes, oblivious to the bites from mosquitoes and other bugs.

Several hours passed. When the sealed acupoints on his back finally opened up, it was already dark. He managed to stand up and slowly walk back to the small restaurant.

“I’d better disguise myself so those two villains won’t recognize me, even if they see me face to face. How am I going to rescue my parents if I get myself killed?” he said to himself.

After entering the restaurant owner’s room and lighting the oil-lamp, he searched for clothing, but the mountain people were so poor that they did not even own a spare set of

clothes in which to change. Feeling very disappointed, he walked out of the restaurant when he spotted the bodies of the owner and his wife lying on the ground. "Well, I guess I'll have to use the clothes of the deceased," he thought. He took the clothes off of the dead body and held them in his hands. They looked filthy and stank badly.

He considered washing the clothing before putting it on, but then decided against it. If he should miss an opportunity to save his parents simply because of his concern over the cleanliness of clothes, he would surely regret it for the rest of his life. He clenched his teeth, undressed himself, then changed into the dead person's clothes.

Lighting a torch, he looked around, and soon discovered his father's sword and his mother's golden saber lying in a corner. He picked up his father's sword and wrapped it in a rag, tied it to his back, and then walked outside. The croaking of the frogs in the canyon sounded in the distance through the otherwise silent night. Lin Pingzhi suddenly felt overwhelmed with desolation and almost cried out. He threw the torch as hard as he could; the flame formed a beautiful red arc in the night sky before being extinguished in the pond. Instantly, darkness engulfed him once again.

"Lin Pingzhi, Lin Pingzhi! If you can't be cautious and alert, and let yourself fall back into the hands of those Qingcheng villains, then you will be snuffed out, just like that torch falling into that filthy pond," Lin Pingzhi admonished himself.

Raising his arm, he wiped the corners of his eyes with a sleeve. When the sleeve neared his face, the odor reeked so badly that he almost vomited. But he firmly said aloud to himself, "If you can't even withstand this foul odor, you are not a true man!"

He started walking, but before long, his hips began hurting again. He clenched his teeth and increased his pace. However, not knowing which way his parents had been taken, he wandered randomly through different paths in the

mountains. He walked till dawn, when rays of sunshine bathed his face, making it difficult to see things clearly.

Suddenly, a thought struck him, "Those two villains are going to Mount Qingcheng. Szechwan Province is to the west of Fujian. Why am I going east?" He hurriedly turned around and began to walk with his back to the sun.

"Mother and Father have been gone for more than a half day," he thought, "and I was walking the opposite direction for half a night; I must be far away from them by now. I'd better buy a horse. I wonder how much money I will need."

He examined his pocket and then groaned. When they started the trip, all the gold and jewelry were put into a leather saddlebag. Lin Zhennan and Madam Wang both had silver on their persons, but not Lin Pingzhi; he did not have even a single tael. He stamped his foot in frustration. "What should I do? What should I do?" He stared blankly at the sky for a while and then decided, "I must go rescue my parents. I am sure I'll find some way somehow, and not starve."

He began walking toward the foot of the mountain. When it was about noon, his stomach began to growl loudly. Some green fruits on a tree by the side of the road caught his eye. They were not ripe yet, but at least they would assuage his hunger. He went up to the tree to pick some fruits, but then realized that the fruits belonged to someone else. Taking them without permission was really no different from stealing. For three generations, the Lin family had protected goods from being robbed or stolen by bandits. How could he do something that only common thieves do? If somebody saw him, and called him a thief in front of his father, it would have brought great shame to his father! The honor of the Fortune Prestige Escort House would be disgraced forever.

He had learned when he was still a little boy that all infamous criminals started out as small thieves, and that small thieves usually began by stealing only small things, like a squash or fruit. Then they would start to steal more and

more, finally losing all self-control, and never able to stop. At that thought, he broke out in a cold sweat.

“One day, Father and I will restore the fame of the Fortune Prestige Escort House! I must always do what a true man does. I would rather beg than steal from others,” he vowed.

He continued on his trip in a hurry, and gave no more thought to the fruit trees by the road. A couple of miles later, he arrived at a small village. He walked to a shack and started begging for food in a halting voice. He was used to being waited upon for everything all his life, and had never before needed to beg for anything from other people. After uttering only a couple of words his face had already turned red with shame.

The farmer’s wife in the shack had just received a severe beating from her husband and was still in a foul mood. When she saw that Lin Pingzhi was just a mere beggar, she immediately released a torrent of abuse at him.

“You little thief, what are you doing sneaking around! I just lost a hen. You probably stole it, and now you want more? Even if I had some food, I wouldn’t give it to a thief like you. You stole my hen, and made my wretch of a husband so angry that he beat me all black and blue!” she yelled, waving a broom.

Every time the woman spat out a curse, Lin Pingzhi stepped back a little. The woman became so excited that she swung her broom at Lin Pingzhi’s face. Lin Pingzhi was furious. He moved to the side to dodge the broom, and then shot a strike at the woman with his palm.

A sudden thought popped up into his head, “How shameful, beating up a dumb farmer’s wife, just because she doesn’t want to give me food?” He tried to catch himself, but since he had used too much strength in the strike, he lost his balance and stumbled. Then, his left foot happened to land on a pile of cow dung. He slipped and fell on his back.

The farmer's wife burst into a loud laugh. "You little thief! You've got just what you deserve!" She smacked him on his head with her broom and spat on him, then turned around and went into the shack.

Lin Pingzhi's anger soared from the humiliation. He got up and found that his hands and face were covered with cow dung. Surprisingly, the farmer's wife came back out with four boiled corncobs and stuck them into his hands.

"Go on, kid, take these! God gave you such a pretty face, even prettier than a girl's, but you don't want to apply yourself. You are just a lazy bum! What good are you?" She said with a laugh.

Still angry, Lin Pingzhi made to hurl the corncobs away, but the farmer's wife grinned, "Very well! Throw them away! Go ahead! Hey, you've got guts and you are not afraid to starve! Great! Throw them away, and I will watch you starve!"

Lin Pingzhi reconsidered, "In order to rescue Father and Mother, and to seek revenge and restore the fame of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, I will have to bear all kinds of humiliation. Starting from today, no matter how hard or humiliating it is, I will just clench my teeth and take it without complaint. To be humiliated by a farmer's wife is really nothing." So he said, "Many thanks!" and then took a big bite of a corncob.

"I knew you wouldn't throw them away," the farmer's wife smiled. She turned and walked away, still mumbling, "This kid is so hungry; it probably wasn't him who stole my hen. Ah, the damn husband, if he only had half of this kid's good temper, my life would be much better."

Along the way, Lin Pingzhi sometimes begged for food, and sometimes, just ate wild fruits from the bushes. Luckily, this was a good harvest year in Fujian Province, and most families had extra food left over. Although his face was covered with mud, he spoke with good manners, so people liked him, and it wasn't too hard for him to beg for food. He

tried to ask for information regarding his parents' whereabouts along the road, but was not able to learn anything. Eight days later, he entered Jiangxi province. He asked for directions to Nancang and went there straightaway. He thought that the Escort House branch in Nancang should have some information. If not, at least he could get some money and a fast horse.

After entering the town of Nancang, he asked someone on the street about the Fortune Prestige Escort House.

"Fortune Prestige Escort House? Why do you ask? It has been burned down to the ground. Even the neighbors' houses were burnt down all together. There's nothing left," the man answered.

Lin Pingzhi groaned inwardly. He came to the street of the Escort House and saw with his own eyes that the entire street was littered with debris. He stood there silently for a long time, his heart aching.

"It must be those gangsters from the Qingcheng Sword School again. If I cannot have my revenge, I would rather die!" he resolved.

Without delaying in Nancang, he immediately went on with his trip westward. Several days later, he arrived at Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province. He had thought that the Qingcheng Sword School might have also burned down this Escort House branch, but when he asked people about news regarding the Fortune Prestige Escort House, no one had heard anything. Lin Pingzhi felt great relief and started heading toward the Escort House in big strides. Soon, he arrived at the gate.

Although the Hunan branch of the Escort House was not as big as the Fuzhou Headquarters Escort House, it too had a huge vermilion gate with two big majestic stone lions sitting on either side. Lin Pingzhi peeked inside, but did not see anyone.

"I am almost in rags, and look so awkward; the escorts in this branch might scoff at me." He hesitated at the doorway.



He raised his head and then noticed that the sign “Fortune Prestige Escort House Hunan Branch” was upside down. “How could the escorts in this branch be so absentminded as to hang the sign upside down?” he was quite surprised.

Then he turned his head to look at the flags on the flagpoles, and his heart sank. A pair of dirty saddles hung on top of the left flagpole. On the right flagpole was a pair of flower-patterned woman’s pants. The pants were torn to shreds, but still fluttered in the wind. While he looked on in shock, a man walked out from the Escort House.

“Hey, you son of a turtle. What are you doing sneaking around here? You trying to steal something?” the man yelled.

Recognizing that the man had the same kind of accent as Fang Renzhi and Jia Renda, Lin Pingzhi knew that he must have come from Szechwan as well, so he did not even look at him and immediately started walking away. Suddenly, he felt a pain in his backside. The man had given him a hard kick. Infuriated, Lin Pingzhi wanted to turn around and fight the man, but he quashed the urge in an instant. With the Escort House obviously occupied by the Qingcheng Sword School, it was a perfect opportunity for him to try and get information about his parents. All he needed to do was to stay calm.

Pretending to be just an ordinary person with no skill in Kung Fu whatsoever, he pretended to take a spill onto the ground, and feigned an inability to get up. The man burst into loud laughter and called him “son of turtles” a few more times before walking back inside.

Lin Pingzhi stood up slowly and ambled into a small alley. He begged for a bowl of cold rice and ate it.

“The enemy is so close by; I’d better not get careless!” He kept reminding himself.

Finding some coal ashes on the ground, he smeared them onto his face until it was completely black, then huddled up in a corner against the alley wall and fell asleep.

Lin Pingzhi waited till about ten at night, then took out his long sword and hung it at his waist. He circled around to the back door of the Escort House and listened carefully. After making sure there was no sound from within the walls, he jumped on top of the wall. Inside was an orchard. He jumped down quietly and started creeping slowly along the perimeter of the wall. Darkness engulfed the orchard. There was neither light nor sound; he could feel the beating of his heart. He had his hand out against the wall as he walked, and was dreading the moment he would step on a rock or dry hay and make a noise that would give him away. After walking through two courtyards, he saw light coming from the East Hall window, so he crept a couple of steps closer, when he heard somebody talking. Slowly moving closer and resting under the window, he held his breath and lowered himself, inch by inch, until he was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. Just after he sat down, he heard someone's voice.

"Let's just burn the whole son of a turtle Escort House tomorrow morning, so we don't have to stay here and make fools of ourselves."

"No! We can't!" another voice said. "Senior apprentice brother Pi and others just burnt down the entire Escort House Nancang branch, and I heard that dozens of neighbors' houses were burnt down as well. Something like that won't be good for the reputation of our chivalrous Qingcheng Sword School. That incident will most likely get them punished by Master."

Lin Pingzhi was outraged. Now, there was no doubt that the Qingcheng Sword School was behind these despicable acts. He cursed their hypocrisy for having the gall to still call themselves chivalrous.

"Well then, we really shouldn't burn the house down. But are we going to just leave the house intact?" the previous voice asked.

The other one laughed. "Junior apprentice brother Ji, think about it. We've already hung the sign of the Escort

House upside down and also raised a pair of women's pants on top of their flagpole. The name of Fortune Prestige Escort House has already been totally trashed. We should leave the pants hanging there for as long as possible. Why bother burning down the house?"

"You're right, senior apprentice brother Shen!" Ji laughed. "Ha-ha, the pair of pants is going to bring the Escort House so much bad luck, they won't be able to regain their reputation for at least another three hundred years."

The two laughed for some time, then Ji said, "We're going to the town of Hengshan tomorrow for Liu Zhengfeng's ceremony; what present shall we bring? The news of the ceremony came so unexpectedly. If the present isn't valuable enough, it won't look very good for our Qingcheng Sword School."

"I've got the present ready," Shen said in good humor, "and relax; I guarantee you that we won't lose face for the Qingcheng Sword School. The present might even get us a lot of attention at the banquet for the Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony."

"What is the present? Why don't I know about it?" Ji asked delightedly.

Shen was quite content and let out a chuckle. "We are just liberating it, so we can make a gift of it. No need to take anything out of our own pockets. Look, is this good enough?"

The sound of someone opening a package came through the window.

"Amazing!" Ji burst out in a cry of surprise. "Senior brother Shen, do you have magic powers? Where the hell did you get such expensive items?" Ji asked in awe.

Lin Pingzhi was really tempted to look inside through the crack of the window to see what kind of present it was, but he maintained his discipline, realizing that if he were to stick his head up, a shadow could fall on the window; it would be all over if he let the enemy find him. So, he suppressed his curiosity. Then he heard Shen's voice, again.

“Did you think that we occupied the Fortune Prestige Escort House for nothing? I was going to present this pair of jade horses to Master, but right now, it is probably better to let old Liu Zhengfeng be the lucky recipient.”

A tide of anger washed over Lin Pingzhi. “So they robbed the treasure from our Escort House and used it for their own advantage. What a bunch of burglars! What treasure would the Hunan Escort House Branch have? It was probably a client’s goods, waiting to be escorted. The pair of jade horses must be extremely valuable. If we can’t get them back, Father would have to be the one to compensate.”

Shen laughed again. “There are four bags here, one for all of Master’s wives,<sup>24</sup> one for all the apprentices, one for you, and one for me! Go ahead, pick one.”

“What are these?” Ji asked. After a short while, he burst out with another exclamation of surprise, “Wow, these are all gold and jewels! We are damn rich now!!! What a son of a turtle the Escort House is! The hell with them! They really have extorted a lot of money! Senior apprentice brother, how did you find these? I searched all over the Escort House over a dozen times, and I was just about to dig up the grounds. All I found was about a hundred taels of silver. How did you find all this treasure without breaking a sweat?”

Shen sounded very pleased with himself. “Do you think they just put their gold and treasure anywhere? For the last couple of days, I watched you open drawers, smash boxes, take down walls, and have a good time searching. I knew that you’d be busy over nothing. But you would not have believed me, even if I had told you. Anyway, all that searching wouldn’t hurt you, big boy.”

“Excellent, excellent! Senior apprentice brother Shen, where did you find these?”

“Think about it, there is one thing in this Escort House that was out of place. What was it?”

“Out of place? Lots of things are out of place in this son of a turtle Escort House. For one, their Kung Fu skills were so

damn poor, but they hung a picture of a vicious looking lion on their flagpole,” Ji scoffed.

“We replaced the big lion with a pair of woman’s pants. Now it is appropriate.” Shen laughed. “Think again! Are there any other strange things in this Escort House?”

“These Hunan asses have too many odd habits. For example, Escort Zhang is the chief of the entire branch Escort House, but he put a coffin in the room next to his own bedroom. What bad luck! Ha-ha!” Ji slapped his leg.

“Use your head!” Shen chuckled. “Why would he put a coffin in the next room? Could it be the body of his wife or son that he really hates to part with? I think not! I figured he hid something important in the coffin. The coffin was just used to....”

“Aha!!” Ji jumped up in realization. “That’s it! That’s it! These treasures were hidden in the coffin! Cool! Damn! These sons of turtles Escorts are just too sneaky. Senior brother Shen, these two bags are of the same size. How can I take the same amount as you? You should take a greater share.” Then there came the sounds of gold and jade, tumbling against each other; apparently, Ji took some jewels out from one bag and put them into another.

There was no sound from Shen declining the offer.

“Senior apprentice brother Shen, I’ll go get some water. Let’s wash our feet and then get some rest,” Ji suggested. He yawned, and then pushed the door open and walked out.

Lin Pingzhi shrank his body under the window, not daring to move a muscle. He peeked from the side of his eyes and caught the glimpse of a short and fat man. It was the one who had kicked him earlier in the day.

A little while later, Ji returned with a basin of hot water.

“Senior apprentice brother Shen, this time, Master sent dozens of apprentices out. I’d say that the two of us have achieved the most. Thanks to you, even I will look good this time. Senior apprentice brother Jiang and other apprentices went to strike the Guangzhou branch, and senior brother Ma

and some other apprentices went to strike the Hangzhou branch; they are so careless, even if they see a coffin, they wouldn't figure out that there could be treasure inside."

"Senior apprentice brother Fang, junior apprentice brother Yu, and Jia Renda got the Fuzhou Headquarters. They must have found more than we did. But since Master's precious son got killed in Fuzhou, they're going to end up with more blame than credit," Shen said cheerfully.

"Master, himself, organized the attacks against the Fortune Prestige Escort House headquarters; senior apprentice brother Fang and junior apprentice brother Yu were just scouts," Ji said, "Master won't blame senior apprentice brother Fang and junior apprentice brother Yu for the death of junior apprentice brother Yu. This time we are striking out in full strength. All the apprentices started the attacks against the headquarters and the branches of the Escort House at the same time. But no one expected that the skills of the Lin family were nowhere near their reputation; just three scouts alone were enough to capture Lin Zhennan and his wife. Even Master didn't see that coming. Ha-ha!"

Lin Pingzhi felt cold sweat dripping down his forehead. It was clear that the Qingcheng Sword School had been plotting the attacks for a long time, and attacked all the Escort Houses simultaneously. The trouble didn't start because he had killed that man named Yu; even if he hadn't killed that rascal Yu, they would have attacked the Escort Houses all the same. Even Yu Canghai, himself, came to Fuzhou; it was no wonder then, that there was an attacker with the skill necessary to perform the "Heart Crushing Palm." But how did the Escort House offend the Qingcheng Sword School? Why did they attack so viciously? By now, he realized he no longer needed to blame himself for causing all the trouble and his rage was ready to explode. If it weren't for the fact that his Kung Fu skills were no match for his enemies, he'd have broken through the window and chopped

the two animals inside into little bits! Then he heard splashing from inside. The two had begun washing their feet.

“Master didn’t have the wrong impression,” Shen continued. “Years ago, when the Fortune Prestige Escort House shocked the southeast region of the Martial World, they seemed to have some real skills. The ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ earned them a great reputation; they couldn’t have done it by trickery. I’d say the descendants probably weren’t smart enough to learn the real skills from their ancestors.”

Lin Pingzhi’s face turned red with shame.

“Before we came down Mount Qingcheng,” Shen went on, “Master taught us the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art.’ Although we couldn’t learn the complete set of techniques very well in only a couple of months, I think this set of sword moves has a lot of potential; it’s just hard to release the power. Junior apprentice brother Ji, how much did you figure out?”

“I heard from Master that even Lin Zhennan himself, could not grasp much of the true idea behind the set of sword moves,” Ji replied, “so I didn’t really study it that hard. Senior apprentice brother Shen, Master gave the order for all apprentices to meet at Hengshan; this means that senior apprentice brother Fang and the others will bring the Lin couple to Hengshan, right? I wonder what kind of character the descendent of the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ is.”

Hearing the shocking news that his parents were still alive, and would be brought to Hengshan, Lin Pingzhi felt both joy and sorrow at the same time.

“In just a few short days, you will meet him,” Shen said, “then you can practice the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ with him, ha-ha.”

Suddenly the window opened. Lin Pingzhi was astounded and thought that they had discovered him. Just when he was about to run away, he was doused with hot water from the basin being poured out of the window. He almost cried out in

astonishment because of the soaking. The light in the room was soon put out, and darkness fell over the courtyard.

Lin Pingzhi was still in shock. He could feel water dripping down from his face, and it had a foul odor, he then realized that fellow Ji must have poured the filthy water, in which they just washed their feet, on him. Although Ji didn't do this intentionally, it was still quite humiliating. But at least, he had learned some information regarding his parents; so no matter what, even if he had to be soaked in urine, it would have been worth it.

The night was now silent. Afraid that the two might hear him if he left right away, he decided to wait till they fell asleep. He leaned against the wall and stayed motionless under the window. After quite a while, the sound of snores arose from inside, and he stood up slowly.

Lin Pingzhi glanced back and suddenly saw a long quivering shadow cast on the window. Startled, he squatted down instinctively. Then he discovered that it was the window shutter wobbling slightly in the night wind, and realized that Ji didn't bolt the window after dumping out the water.

"Now is the perfect time for revenge!" he told himself.

He pulled out his long sword with his right hand, then gently lifted the shutter with his left hand, climbed into the room, and then slowly closed the window. Moonlight shone through the paper on the window; he could see the two men asleep, one on each bed, by one side of the room. The one with a bald head was facing the wall. The other with a wild bush of a beard was lying on his back. Five bags and two swords sat on the table in front of the beds.

Lin Pingzhi raised his sword. "One slash each, just as easy as that!" he thought to himself. But when he was about to swing his sword at the fellow who had his face up, another thought came to him. "If I kill these two in such an underhanded way, I would simply be a sneaky murderer. If, later, I can master the family Kung Fu skills, and then



challenge these Qingcheng villains, face to face, that would be a hero's way of doing it!"

He moved the five bags to the table by the window, pushed the window open gently, and then stepped out. He slid his sword back into its sheath by his waist and took all the bags out through the window. After tying three of the bags to his back and grabbing the other two with his hands, he walked slowly toward the back courtyard, afraid to make any noise that might wake up the two. He opened the back door and quietly walked out of the Escort House. After orientating himself with his surroundings he headed directly toward the south town gate. The gate was still closed because it was nighttime, so he hid by a small hummock and tried to get some rest. His heart beat very rapidly, since he still feared that the two Qingcheng apprentices might find out what had happened and come after him before he could get away.

At dawn the next morning, when the gate opened, he went out immediately, and spared no strength running down the road. After running for four or five miles, he finally felt he was out of danger and calmed down. Ever since leaving Fuzhou, this was the first time he truly felt relaxed. Seeing a small noodle restaurant by the road, he went in and ordered a bowl of noodles. He did not dare to stay long, so after finishing up the bowl, he immediately reached into the bag for money and took a small lump of silver out to pay for the meal. The restaurant owner gathered all the copper coins in the small restaurant and still could not find enough change. Lin Pingzhi simply waved his hand and said loudly, "Keep the change! Don't worry about it!"

After so many days of ill treatment, humiliation, and being looked down upon during his travels, Lin Pingzhi finally reclaimed his rich Young Master attitude.

After another ten miles, Lin Pingzhi arrived at a large town. He booked a first-class inn room and then opened the five bags after bolting the door and the windows shut. The

first four bags contained all manner of gold, silver, jade, and jewelry. The fifth bag, a bit smaller, contained a beautiful brocade box, and inside the box, there was a pair of five-inch tall jade horses.

“With just one branch of the Escort House, we’ve already accumulated so much treasure, no wonder even the Qingcheng Sword School has cast greedy eyes on the Escort Houses,” he thought aloud.

He took out some small lumps of silver and put them in his pocket, and then combined all the rest into a big package he could carry on his back. He then went to the market and bought two fast horses. For the next couple of days, he rode the two horses in turns and only slept four or five hours each night. Thus, by spending as much time as possible traveling, he soon arrived at the town of Hengshan.

As soon as he entered the town, he noticed many denizens of the Martial World, going about the streets. Concerned about the possibility of bumping into Fang Renzhi or other Qingcheng Sword School members, he ducked his head and straightaway went to look for an inn. But after checking several inns, he found that none of them had any vacancy.

“It’s going to be Master Liu’s Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony three days from now; that’s why our inn is already full of guests. Try your luck at another inn,” a porter suggested.

With no other choice, Lin Pingzhi tried his luck in some remote streets, and after asking at three different inns, he finally found a small room. He figured, “Although I have covered my face with ashes, Fang Renzhi is pretty sharp, and he might still be able to see through my disguise.” So he bought three pieces of sticking plaster at the local pharmacy and stuck the plaster to his face. He stretched his eyebrow downward and pulled the left corner of his mouth up until it was turned over and revealed half of his teeth. When he looked at himself in the mirror, Lin Pingzhi saw an ugly man

of miserable appearance; even he himself could not stand it. He then strapped the big bag containing all the treasure against his back and then dressed over it. Bowing down a little, he was transformed into a hunchback with a big hump.

"I look so dreadful, even Mom and Dad wouldn't recognize me now. No more worries," he thought.

After eating a big bowl of noodles with pork chops, he decided to just wander around, hoping to accidentally bump into his parents, or simply hear something about the Qingcheng Sword School. Any information at all would be useful. He wandered for about half a day, until small raindrops suddenly began to fall from the sky. He bought a big bamboo fiber hat on the street and hurriedly put it on. Dark, heavy clouds were gathering close to the horizon, and it seemed that the rain wasn't going to stop anytime soon. He turned into a street and saw a teashop full of people, so he went in and sat down. The waiter brought out a teapot, a small plate of pumpkin seeds, and a small plate of broad beans.

Lin Pingzhi drank a cup of tea and started chewing the seeds to kill time, when he heard somebody say, "Hey hunchback! Mind if we share your table?" The man did not wait for Lin Pingzhi to answer and just sat down. Two others sat down, as well.

At first, Lin Pingzhi didn't realize that the man was talking to him. After a slight hesitation he finally remembered that he was the "hunchback" they had referred to, so he replied with a smile, "Sure, sure, be my guest!" All three were dressed in black and all had weapons by their waists.

The three men were intent upon their drinking and conversation, and didn't even give Lin Pingzhi a second glance.

"Master Liu's Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony is really going to be a big party. It's still three days until the

ceremony, and guests have already filled the whole town,” a young one said.

“Of course!” a one-eyed man concurred. “The Hengshan Sword School has already got a great reputation by itself, not to mention that it is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, which is even more famous. Who wouldn’t want to be on their good side? Besides, Liu Zhengfeng, Master Liu, is excellent in Kung Fu. His expertise is in the thirty-six moves of Wind-twirling Geese-falling Sword, and he is considered the second best in the Hengshan Sword School, only slightly lower in skill than the Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School – Great Mr. Mo. Lots of people have wanted to make his acquaintance, but he never had birthday parties, or weddings for his children, or any kind of events, so there were no good excuses to meet him. No wonder all kinds of people from the Martial World are gathering here once they heard about the happy Gold Basin Hand Washing event. I’d say tomorrow and the day after, it’s going to be even more crowded in the town of Hengshan.”

“Not everyone is coming here just to make friends with Liu Zhengfeng,” another man with a graybeard said sardonically. “The three of us are not coming for that, are we? Liu Zhengfeng is doing his Gold Basin Hand Washing; that means after the ceremony, he will never use his Kung Fu again, and will no longer care about justices and injustices in the Martial World. There won’t be a Master Liu in the Martial World, anymore. Since he will vow to never use his sword again, what’s the use of the thirty-six moves of the Wind-twirling Geese-falling Sword? After the Hand Washing, a Kung Fu master would be just like any average person, and all his skills will be wasted. What’s the point of making friends with him, then?”

“Well,” the young one argued, “although Master Liu won’t be using his Kung Fu skills anymore, he is still the second most powerful person in the Hengshan Sword School. By making friends with Master Liu, one can also make friends

with the Hengshan Sword School, which in turn means you can make friends with the Five Mountains Sword Alliance!”

“To make friends with the Five Mountains Sword Alliance? Are you worthy of that?” The graybeard sneered.

“Brother Peng, don’t talk like that,” the one-eyed man said. “We live in the Martial World, the more friends the better, the less enemies the luckier. The Five Mountains Sword Alliance does have great skills, yet they still show respect to all the friends in the Martial World. If they had acted arrogantly, and looked down upon everyone else, then why are there so many guests in Hengshan Town?”

The graybeard snorted and fell silent. After a long while, he spoke again, “Probably because people curry favor with the powerful. Just looking at them makes me angry.”

Lin Pingzhi wished the three would keep talking, so perhaps they might say something about the Qingcheng Sword School. But since they did not agree with each other, each just drank his tea and said nothing. Then, he heard someone behind him speak with a low voice.

“Uncle Wang, I heard that Master Liu is only about fifty years old, just about the prime age for his Kung Fu skills. Why did he suddenly decide to quit the Martial World? Isn’t that a waste?”

An old voice answered, “People in the Martial World have all kinds of reasons to wash their hands. For example, someone can be a big gangster of the heterodox persuasion, who had committed many crimes, but after washing his hands, he won’t be killing people or burning houses any longer. So, by doing this, he can firstly leave a better reputation for his descendants; and secondly, if serious crimes were committed in his neighborhood, he would not be a suspect. But Master Liu is very wealthy and his family has been rich for many generations, so of course what I just said would not apply to him.”

“Of course! It has nothing to do with him,” another man agreed.

Uncle Wang continued, "One that studies martial arts deals with combat all his life. It is very possible that at some point, he will hurt or kill somebody and make enemies. As he gets old, knowing that all these enemies are still out there in the Martial World could really weigh him down with worry. Now when Master Liu invited so many guests and informed the entire world that he won't be using Kung Fu anymore, what he is really saying is that his enemies won't have to worry about his taking revenge, and that he, himself, hopes that his enemies won't come and give him trouble, either."

"Uncle Wang, don't you think he is really putting himself at a disadvantage?" the young man asked.

"Why a disadvantage?" Uncle Wang didn't understand the question.

"Master Liu won't be going around giving trouble to other people," the young man explained, "but other people can come and give trouble to him at anytime. If someone wants to kill him, and Master Liu can't use his Kung Fu skills, then is he just going to let them kill him without even defending himself?"

"You young lads really don't know much!" Uncle Wang grinned. "If somebody wants to kill you, of course you are going to defend yourself. With the kind of fame the Hengshan Sword School has and the great skills Master Liu possesses, one should pray to Buddha that Master Liu doesn't give him any trouble. Who would be so stupid as to give trouble to him? Do they have the heart of a lion or the guts of a panther? Even if Master Liu decides to not fight them himself, he has many apprentices; which of them would be easy to overcome? You are really worrying for nothing!"

"There is always someone stronger than the strong. Who dares to claim that he can defeat all comers?" the graybeard that sat opposite to Lin Pingzhi murmured to himself. But he spoke with a very low voice and neither of the two behind him heard his words.

“Like those escorts,” Uncle Wang went on, “if they had made a fortune, and then decided to retire at the height of their career, close their business early, wash their hands and stop earning risky money, that would have been a smart thing to do.”

These words struck Lin Pingzhi like a thunder. “If Father had retired a couple of years ago and washed his hands, what would life be like today?” he couldn’t help asking himself.

“Clay jars always break by the well; generals always die in battles. Onlookers always see better than the players; to really quit at the height of one’s career is far easier said than done,” the graybeard murmured again.

“Absolutely!” the one-eyed man couldn’t agree more. “For the last couple of days, I’ve heard many people say: ‘Master Liu’s fame is like the sun at high noon, and he resolutely retired at the height of his career. How admirable!’”

A middle-aged man, dressed in silk robes, sitting by the table on the left, broke into their conversation. “I was in the town of Wuhan a couple of days ago. I heard from some friends in the Martial World that Master Liu had to wash his hands and renounce the Martial World because of troubles that would be better left unmentioned.”

“What did they say? Why don’t you tell us about it?” the one-eyed man turned around and asked.

“The story would be fine in Wuhan. But here in Hengshan, I’d better not speak so freely,” the man smiled.

“Many people have already heard the rumor, so why do you bother pretending it’s such a secret?” a short fat man said in a deep grumpy voice. “Everybody is saying that Master Liu has to wash his hands, because he is too skilled in Kung Fu and that he is too popular among friends.”

He spoke with a loud voice, and instantly, all interested eyes turned to him.

“Why does someone have to quit the Martial World because of his skills and popularity? Why is that?” several people asked at the same time.

“People who don’t know the inside story will be confused, of course, but once you learn the secrets, you won’t think it strange at all,” the short fat man said contentedly.

“What inside story?” somebody asked.

The short fat man just smiled, but did not answer.

“Why bother asking him? He doesn’t know the story, either. He’s just blowing a lot of hot air,” a thin man several tables away retorted haughtily.

“Of course I know it,” the short fat man declared loudly, unable to ignore the barb. “Master Liu is washing his hands, because he takes the situation as a whole into consideration – so there won’t be internal conflict within the Hengshan Sword School.”

Once again, several people clamored for an explanation, all at once.

“How is he taking the situation as a whole?”

“What internal conflicts?”

“Do they have problems between fellow apprentices?”

The short fat man began his explanation. “Outsiders all consider Master Liu the second best fighter in the Hengshan Sword School, but everybody in the Hengshan Sword School knows that Master Liu’s skill in the thirty-six moves of the Wind-twirling Geese-falling Sword is far greater than the Head Master of Hengshan Sword School – Great Mr. Mo. Great Mr. Mo can pierce three wild geese with one thrust, but Master Liu can get five. All of the apprentices under Master Liu are better than those apprentices under Great Mr. Mo. The situation has become more and more tense. In a couple of years, Great Mr. Mo’s fame most likely will be eclipsed by that of Master Liu. I heard that the two factions have already fought a couple of times in secret. Master Liu has a large, wealthy family. He doesn’t want to compete with his senior apprentice brother for fame. That’s why he wants to wash his



hands so he can just retire quietly to a life of peace and luxury.”

“Most admirable!” many people declared, nodding. “Master Liu knows what’s important and what’s not. People like that are rare.”

“Then Great Mr. Mo is really making a great mistake. Isn’t he weakening the power of his own Hengshan Sword School by forcing Master Liu to renounce the Martial World?” someone else asked.

“How can one man figure everything out? All I want is to be the Head Master of the Sword School without challenge. Who the hell cares if the power is more or less?” the middle-aged man in silk sneered in imitation of Great Mr. Mo.

The short fat man took a couple of sips of tea and began banging the lid of the teapot loudly. “More tea, more tea!” he shouted. Then he said, “See, this is really a big event for the Hengshan Sword School. There are guests from every kind of school and clan, but the Hengshan Sword School itself....”

Before he could finish his sentence, someone near the door struck some chords on a huqin,<sup>25</sup> and someone began to sing, “The poor Yang Family, showed great loyalty, protected...the Song Government....” The words were drawn out and sounded quite melancholic. Everybody turned around to look, and saw an old, tall, thin man sitting next to a table. His face looked haggard, and he was dressed in a long blue robe. The robe had been washed so many times that some parts looked more white than blue, making him look quite decrepit. He was obviously some kind of a begging performer.

“Shut your devilish voice,” the short fat man yelled at him. “Don’t you know that you just cut me off?”

The old man stopped playing his huqin so loudly, but continued humming, “At the Golden Sand Beach...double dragons met...lost the battle....”

“Hey, buddy, you were just talking about all the schools and clans having sent people, so what about the Hengshan

Sword School, itself?" someone asked.

"The apprentices of Master Liu are greeting guests all over Hengshan town, but other than Master Liu's apprentices, have you seen any other apprentices from Hengshan Sword School?" the short fat man continued.

The people in the crowd just looked at each other and their speculation turned into an indistinct buzz.

"That's right! How come we didn't see any? But isn't that a bit disrespectful to Master Liu?"

The short fat man grinned at the man in the silk robe. "That's why I think you are just plain chicken; afraid to talk about the internal conflict in the Hengshan Sword School. What are you worried about? No one from the Hengshan Sword School is going to be here, so how are they going to hear about this?"

The sound of the huqin once again got louder and the tune changed. The old man began to sing again, "The young lad caused great trouble...."

"Stop annoying people," a young man yelled at him. "Here's some money!" He flicked his hand, and a bundle of copper coins flew over and landed right in front of the old man. The aim was very accurate. The old man thanked him and put the coins in his pocket.

"Hey, brother, you are a projectile expert! That throw was most excellent!" the short fat man exclaimed in praise.

"It was nothing." The young man smiled. "So brother, according to what you are saying, Great Mr. Mo is not showing up!"

"How could he show up? The relationship between Great Mr. Mo and Master Liu is like that of water and fire. They'd start a fight the minute they saw each other. Master Liu has already given ground. Great Mr. Mo should be satisfied," the short fat man said.

The old huqin player stood up suddenly, and walked slowly in front of the short fat man. He looked him up and down.

“What do you want, old man?” the short fat man demanded in annoyance.

“You are talking nonsense!” The old man shook his head then turned around and walked away.

Infuriated, the short fat man stuck his hand out to grab the old man by his scruff. Without warning, a light flashed in front of his eyes and the blade of a long thin sword flew toward the table. The sharp ring of the blade echoed. The short fat man was so astonished that he jumped back instinctively, afraid of being hurt by the sword. Then he saw the old man slowly insert the sword into the bottom of the huqin till the entire sword disappeared into the instrument. No one would have expected a sword to be hidden in an old huqin.

“You are talking nonsense!” the old man shook his head again, then slowly walked out of the teashop. Everyone watched him disappear into the rain, and all there was left was the sad music from the huqin, drifting aimlessly in the distance.

“Look, look at the table!” someone uttered in a cry of surprise. Everyone looked in the direction his finger was pointing. There were seven teacups on the table where the short fat man had sat; a ring, about half an inch wide, had been neatly sliced from each cup. The seven china rings had fallen by the cups, yet none of the cups even moved an inch.

People in the teashop gathered around and everyone started talking about the cups.

“Who is he? What incredible sword skills!” one person exclaimed.

“One slice gets all seven cups and none of the cups moved at all, it’s almost like magic!” another one praised.

“Luckily the old gentleman showed mercy upon you,” someone said to the short fat man, “otherwise your head and neck would have been just like these cups.”

“Nah! That old gentleman must be a famous master; he would never have lowered himself to behave so commonly!”

another one commented.

The short fat man just stared at the seven half-cups blankly. His face was completely white and he did not hear a word said by the crowd.

"See, I told you not to talk so much," the middle-aged man in the silk robe said. "Trouble comes from unnecessary words; worry comes from acting without thinking. Right now there are all kinds of hidden dragons and crouching tigers in Hengshan, and many of them are elite fighters! That old gentleman must be a good friend of Great Mr. Mo. He heard your disrespectful words about Great Mr. Mo, so of course, he decided to teach you a lesson."

"He wasn't a good friend of Great Mr. Mo," The graybeard said coldly. "That was the Head Master of Hengshan Sword School, 'Night Rain of Xiaoxiang,' Great Mr. Mo, himself."

"What? He...he was Great Mr. Mo? How do you know?" Everyone was shocked and asked the question simultaneously.

"It's quite elementary," the graybeard said. "Great Mr. Mo loves to play the huqin and especially the song 'Night Rain of Xiaoxiang.' It could move the listeners to tears. The words 'sword hidden in the huqin, sword plays the music' are an apt description of his Kung Fu skills. Since all of you are in Hengshan town, how could you not have heard of that? That brother said earlier that Master Liu could pierce five wild geese with one thrust, but that Great Mr. Mo could only get three, so he sliced seven cups to demonstrate his abilities. If even cups can be sliced into pieces, how hard do you think it would be to get wild geese? No wonder he said that you were talking nonsense."

The short fat man was still in shock. He lowered his head, speechless. The man in the silk robe paid the bill and dragged him out of the teashop.

The people in the teashop had watched the magic thrust from "Night Rain of Xiaoxiang" Great Mr. Mo, and suddenly they all felt a chill settle in their hearts. Since none had

dissented while the short fat man was defaming Great Mr. Mo, they were worried that they might have planted seeds of trouble, so they all paid their bills and left hurriedly. In a short while, the once crowded teashop became almost empty. Other than Lin Pingzhi, there were only two other guests, bent over a table, dozing off.

Lin Pingzhi gazed at the seven half-cups and the seven china rings on the table and sank deep in thought. The old man had been so wretched looking, that it seemed someone could have pushed him over with a single finger, yet with a mere wave of his sword, all seven cups had been sliced in half. If Lin hadn't left Fuzhou, he would have never known that there could be people with such outstanding skills in the world. He was like a frog, watching the sky from inside a well back at the Fortune Prestige Escort House. At that time, he thought that the highest level of Kung Fu people could achieve would be, at most, on par with that of his father. If he were to become a student of this old man and work hard on his Kung Fu training, he might actually have a chance to avenge the Escort House; otherwise, there was really no hope.

Lin Pingzhi mulled over the idea a bit longer. Why couldn't he go and find this Great Mr. Mo and implore him to rescue his parents and take him as an apprentice? He stood up in excitement, but a seed of doubt sprouted within his thoughts. After all, Mo was the Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School, and the Five Mountain Sword Alliance had a good relationship with the Qingcheng Sword School; why would he offend his allies for a total stranger? At this discouraging thought, he sat back down feeling utterly depressed.

Just then, a melodious and tender voice rose, "Second apprentice brother, it looks like the rain just won't stop. I'm almost soaked through. Why don't we stop here for some hot tea?"

Lin Pingzhi was stunned. He recognized the voice the instant he heard it. It was none other than the voice of the ugly wine-selling girl who had saved his life. He lowered his head in a hurry.

"Alright, let's drink some hot tea to warm up a little," a much older sounding voice answered.

The two walked into the teashop and sat at a table, diagonally across from Lin Pingzhi. Lin Pingzhi glanced out of the corner of his eyes and saw the wine-selling girl in a green dress seated with her back to him. The person sitting besides her was the old man who claimed to be her grandfather.

"So you two are really fellow apprentices disguised as grandfather and granddaughter to carry out some scheme in Fuzhou," he thought. But why did they save him? Maybe they would know of his parents' whereabouts.

The waiter cleaned the table and brought out some hot tea. The old man saw the seven half-cups on the table beside them and could not help but utter a cry of surprise.

"Little Apprentice Sister, look!"

"Amazing! Who could have cut these seven cups?" the young girl was also quite surprised.

"Little Apprentice Sister, let me pose a riddle: One thrust seven directions, powerful enough to cut gold and jade. Who do you think cut these seven cups?" the old man asked the girl in a low voice.

"I wasn't here when it happened; how should I know who...?" the girl started to protest, when suddenly, she started clapping her hands in glee. "I've got it! I've got it! It's one of the thirty-six moves of 'Wind-twirling Geese-falling Sword,' the seventeenth move 'One Thrust Drops Nine Geese.' This must be the work of Liu Zhengfeng, Master Liu," she proclaimed triumphantly.

"I am afraid that Master Liu's skills have not progressed to that level yet; you've only got it half right," the old man shook his head with a smile.

“Hold on! Don’t say it!” The girl pointed at him with a big grin. “I know who it was. It...it...it was ‘Night Rain of Xiaoxiang’ Great Mr. Mo!”

All of a sudden, the sounds of applause and laughter came from seven or eight different directions. “Good job, Little Apprentice Sister!” Several people shouted.

Lin Pingzhi was startled. “Where did all these people come from?” He glanced up from the corner of his eyes again and saw that the two dozing men had stood up, and there were five others who just walked out from the teashop’s back room. One was dressed like a porter; one held an abacus in his hands, and looked like a merchant; another had a small monkey perched on his shoulder and looked like a street performer.

“Ha, so you dirty tricksters were all hiding. You almost gave me a heart attack! Where’s Big Apprentice Brother?” the young girl grinned.

“We’ve just met, and you’re already calling us dirty tricksters?” the man with the monkey said with mock seriousness.

“Well, you hid yourselves and tried to scare me, didn’t you? So of course you’re dirty tricksters,” the girl retorted with a grin. “Why isn’t Big Apprentice Brother with you?”

“How come you don’t ask about anything else but your Big Apprentice Brother?” The man with the monkey laughed teasingly. “We’ve barely spoken two sentences and you’ve already asked about your Big Apprentice Brother twice. Why don’t you ask about your sixth apprentice brother?”

The girl stamped her foot on the floor. “Bah! You’re standing here in perfect shape, safe and sound Monkey-boy. Why should I bother asking about you?”

“Well, Big Apprentice Brother is also safe and sound. Why are you asking about him then?” the man with the monkey shot back with a grin.

“I am not talking to you any more,” the girl exclaimed. “Fourth apprentice brother, you’re the only gentleman of the

bunch! Where's Big Apprentice Brother?"

Before the man dressed as porter could answer, several others began to protest. "Ho! Only your fourth apprentice brother is a gentleman, and we are all villains? Hey, Number Four, don't answer her."

"Don't answer then!" the girl exploded in a huff. "If you don't want to tell me, fine! But don't expect me to tell you one word about the strange and interesting things that happened on our way here when I was with second apprentice brother."

The man dressed as porter did not participate in any of the joking and bantering. He seemed to be a simple and straightforward person.

"We departed with Big Apprentice Brother yesterday at Hengyang," he said. "He told us to come first. By now he is probably already sober, and will be here soon."

"He got drunk again?" the girl frowned slightly.

"Yep," the man dressed as a porter answered.

"This time he really drank his fill," the man with the abacus cut in. "He drank from morning till noon, and then from noon till dusk. He probably drank at least twenty to thirty liters of good wine!"

"That's not good for his health! Why didn't you talk to him?" the girl admonished.

The man with the abacus stuck his tongue out and made a face. "If Big Apprentice Brother would listen to other people's advice, then the sun would have risen from the west. But I guess if Little Apprentice Sister tried to stop him, then he might drink one liter less." Everyone laughed at these words.

"Why did he start drinking like that? Was he celebrating something?" the girl asked.

"You'll have to ask him about that," the man with the abacus replied. "I think he figured he would see his Little Apprentice Sister when he came to Hengshan town and felt really happy about it, so he decided to celebrate."



“Nonsense!” the girl sniffed, yet she sounded quite pleased.

Lin Pingzhi listened to the joking among these fellow apprentices. “It seems this girl really likes her Big Apprentice Brother very much,” he thought. “But if that second apprentice brother is already so old, the Big Apprentice Brother must be even older. The girl is only sixteen or seventeen, how could she fall in love with someone so old?” He thought a bit longer and then found an answer. “Ah, yes. The girl has pox-marks all over her face. She is way too ugly. No one else would take her, so she has to love an old drunkard.”

Then he heard the girl asking again, “So Big Apprentice Brother started drinking since yesterday morning?”

“I guess if we don’t tell you the whole story, you just won’t leave us alone,” the man with the monkey conceded. “Yesterday morning the eight of us were just about to start the trip when Big Apprentice Brother suddenly detected the scent of some great wine from the street. We checked it out, and found a beggar drinking out of a wine calabash. That really piqued Big Apprentice Brother’s sense of wine, so he went over to talk to the beggar, praising his wine, and asking what kind it was. The beggar replied that it was monkey wine, and Big Apprentice Brother asked what monkey wine was. The beggar then answered that monkeys in western Hunan Province knew how to use fruits to make wine. The fruits those monkeys used were the freshest and sweetest, so the wine made from them was the best as well. The beggar had walked into the monkeys’ domain by accident, and the monkeys happened to be away, so he stole three calabashes of wine and also caught a small monkey. See, this is him.” He pointed to the monkey on his shoulder. One of the monkey’s legs was tied to his wrist by a line. The monkey kept rubbing its head, scratching its cheeks, and making faces; it looked very comical.

The girl looked at the monkey and burst into laughter. "Sixth apprentice brother, no wonder your nickname is Monkey-Six. You and your little friend here look just like twins."

"We are not twins," Monkey-Six said with a straight face. "We are fellow apprentices. This little fellow is my Big Apprentice Brother, and I am his junior." Everyone burst into loud laughter.

The girl laughed as well. "Aha, you are making fun of Big Apprentice Brother. Wait till I tell him about this. He'll be sure to kick your backside."

"How did your brother end up in your hands?" she asked again after giggling for awhile.

"My brother?" Monkey-Six was lost for a moment. "Are you talking about this little critter? Well, that's a long story. It's going to give me a headache!"

"You don't have to tell me, I can guess," the girl said archly. "Big Apprentice Brother must have asked for the monkey, and asked you to take care of it, hoping the little thing would make a calabash of wine for him!"

"Hey, that's right!" Monkey-Six said.

"Big Apprentice Brother always likes to come up with these hare-brained schemes," the girl said. "The monkeys only make wine when they're in the mountains. Now that he's caught, why would he collect fruits to make wine? If you let him go loose to find fruits, wouldn't he just run away?" After a short pause she continued, "Otherwise, how come our Monkey-Six hasn't made any wine?"

"Little Apprentice Sister, you're being impudent to your senior apprentice brother," Monkey-Six said with mock sternness.

"Aha, now you're flaunting your seniority." The girl grinned. "Hey, sixth apprentice brother, you still haven't touched on the real topic. Why did Big Apprentice Brother start drinking all the way from morning to evening?"

“Right,” Monkey-Six said. “Big Apprentice Brother didn’t pay any mind to how dirty the beggar was and pleaded for some wine from him. The beggar was so dirty that he must have had a crust of filth on him at least three inches thick; lice were crawling in and out of his filthy clothes; tears and mucus covered his face. Maybe there was some drool in the calabash as well....”

“Stop it! That’s gross!” the girl covered her mouth and frowned.

“You think it was gross, but not Big Apprentice Brother!” Monkey-Six exclaimed. “The beggar said that only a half calabash of wine was left out of the three. He was not going to give it away to anyone. Big Apprentice Brother took out a tael of silver and offered one tael of silver in exchange for one mouthful of wine.”

The girl was annoyed and amused at the same time. “What a lush!” she spat.

“The beggar finally agreed,” Monkey-Six went on. “He took the money and said, ‘One mouthful! No more!’ Big Apprentice Brother replied, ‘I said one mouthful, so of course only one mouthful!’ He lifted the calabash and started drinking. Who’d expect his mouthful to last so long that he was able to finish the entire half-calabash of wine in just one breath. It turned out that he used the Qi-Gong<sup>26</sup> Master had taught him to drink the entire calabash of wine like a black dragon sipping water from the sea, without ever taking a breath.”

When everyone heard this, they all burst into laughter.

Monkey-Six continued, “Little Apprentice Sister, if you were in Hengyang and witnessed Big Apprentice Brother’s drinking Kung Fu, you’d have nothing but admiration for him!! ‘Spirit concentrates in the Diaphragm, breaths flow around the Forbidden Region, soul floats in the air and rises above the mountains, energy shoots up to the stars.’ His Qi-Gong technique almost reached the pinnacle of perfection and was extremely subtle.”

The girl laughed so hard that she almost fell down. "You big magpie," she scolded, "describing Big Apprentice Brother in such a mean way. Huh! And you'd better be careful, making fun of our Qi-Gong formulas and scripts!"

"I am not making things up." Monkey-Six laughed. "Every one of these six fellow apprentices saw it. Didn't Big Apprentice Brother drink using Qi-Gong?"

"Little Apprentice Sister, it was true!" Other apprentices by the side chimed in, nodding.

"This Qi-Gong technique was so difficult that he was the only one who was allowed to learn it. And all he could use it for was to cheat wine from a beggar," the girl sighed in despair. Yet beneath the condemnation, there was an undercurrent of praise.

Monkey-Six continued with his story. "Big Apprentice Brother drank until the bottom of the calabash pointed to the sky; the beggar of course didn't like it. He seized Big Apprentice Brother's robe and kept yelling that he had agreed to only one mouthful, and how come Big Apprentice Brother had drunk all his wine? Big Apprentice Brother smiled and replied, 'I truly only drank one mouthful. Did you see me take another breath? Without changing breaths, it only counts as one mouthful. We did not specify if it should be a big mouthful or a small mouthful. Actually, I only drank half a mouthful, not the full mouthful. One tael of silver was for one mouthful, half a mouthful should only be worth half a tael of silver. You owe me half a tael of silver!'"

"He drank someone's wine and still wanted to skip out on the bill?" the girl couldn't help laughing.

"The beggar almost cried," Monkey-Six said. "Big Apprentice Brother then said, 'Hey, brother, don't be so upset, I bet you must be quite a wine connoisseur! Come on! Let's drink our fill, my treat!' Then he dragged the beggar into a wine house by the side of the street. Then a bowl for you, a bowl for me, and the two just drank on and on. We waited till noon, and the two were still drinking. Big

Apprentice Brother then asked for the monkey and gave it to me to take care of. By afternoon, the beggar was already lying on the floor, drunk, and unable to get up. Big Apprentice Brother was still drinking by himself but not able to straighten his tongue. He told us to come to Hengshan first, and he would be right behind us.”

“That’s why he was drinking,” The girl was satisfied. She paused for a while and then asked, “Was the beggar a member of the Beggars Clan?”

“Nope. He didn’t know any Kung Fu and he wasn’t carrying any bags either,”<sup>27</sup> the man dressed as a porter said, shaking his head.

The girl gazed at the rain outside for a while. Seeing that there was no sign of it stopping, she murmured, “If you had come together with the others, then you wouldn’t have to make your trip in the rain today.”

“Little Apprentice Sister, you said that you and second apprentice brother saw lots of strange things on your way here; aren’t you going to tell us about them?” Monkey-Six asked.

“What’s the hurry?” the girl asked. “Let’s wait till we see Big Apprentice Brother and then I’ll tell the story, so I don’t need to tell it twice. Where did you agree to meet?”

“We didn’t arrange anything,” Monkey-Six replied. “The town of Hengshan isn’t that big; we’ll bump into each other eventually. Come on, you tricked me into telling the story about Big Apprentice Brother drinking the monkey wine, and now you don’t want to tell us your story?”

The girl’s attention seemed to have drifted away. “Second apprentice brother, will you please tell the story to the other apprentice brothers?” She glanced over at Lin Pingzhi’s back and said, “There are all kinds of people here. Let’s find an inn first and then tell the story at our leisure.”

“All the inns in Hengshan town, big and small, are already full,” said a tall fellow, who didn’t say much before. “Since we don’t want to disturb the Liu House, when we meet

Big Apprentice Brother later, let's go to the temple outside town and rest there. Second apprentice brother, what do you think?"

Since their senior apprentice brother had not yet arrived, it was natural that the old man was looked to as the leader among the apprentices. "Agreed. Until then, we'll wait here for Big Apprentice Brother," he nodded.

Monkey-Six however, was eager to hear their story. "That hunchback is probably a retard. He has been sitting there for so long without moving a bit. Why should you worry about him? Second apprentice brother, when you went to Fuzhou with Little Apprentice Sister, what information were you able to gather? The Fortune Prestige Escort House was wiped out by the Qingcheng Sword School, so does the Lin family have any true skills?" he prompted them in a low voice.

Hearing the name of the Escort House mentioned Lin Pingzhi listened even more intently.

"Little Apprentice Sister and I met Master in Changsha," the old man answered. "Master told us to come to the town of Hengshan to meet Big Apprentice Brother and the rest of you. Let's not rush to the story about Fuzhou yet. Why did Great Mr. Mo use the move 'One Thrust Nine Geese here?' You all saw what happened, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Monkey-Six immediately rushed to tell how people were talking about the Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony of Liu Zhengfeng and how Great Mr. Mo showed up unexpectedly, and scared everybody off.

The old man nodded. After a long pause, he said, "A lot of people in the Martial World are saying that Great Mr. Mo is not getting along with Master Liu. Now that Master Liu is about to have the Hand Washing ceremony, I really don't understand why Great Mr. Mo is acting in such an odd manner and not showing himself in public."

"Second apprentice brother, I heard that the Head Master of the Taishan Sword School, Priest Tian-Men himself, came,

and has already arrived at the Liu House,” the man with the abacus said.

“Priest Tian-Men came in person?” the old man said in surprise. “Master Liu is really going to look good now. Since Priest Tian-Men is staying at the Liu House, if a fight really breaks out between Liu and Mo, the two apprentice brothers of Hengshan Sword School, Great Mr. Mo won’t have such an easy job of it with such an elite fighter as backup for Master Liu.”

“Second apprentice brother, whom will Master Yu from the Qingcheng Sword School help then?” the girl asked.

Hearing the words “Master Yu from Qingcheng Sword School,” Lin Pingzhi felt as if somebody had just punched him in the stomach.

Monkey-Six and the others all started talking at once.

“Master Yu is here too?”

“It is not easy to get him off Mount Qingcheng.”

“There’s going to be a big crowd in Hengshan now. So many master level elite fighters! I am afraid that there might be some big fights.”

“Little Apprentice Sister, who told you that Master Yu came too?”

“Why do I have to be told? I saw him with my own eyes,” the girl stated.

“You saw Master Yu? In Hengshan?” Monkey-Six asked.

“Not only in Hengshan town, but also in Fujian province and Jiangxi province,” the girl said.

“Why did Master Yu go to Fujian, Little Apprentice Sister? But I guess you probably wouldn’t know, would you?” the man with the abacus said.

“Fifth apprentice brother,” the girl replied, “you don’t have to prod me. I was going to tell you, but since you want to provoke me, I won’t say a thing!”

“This story is only about the Qingcheng Sword School. There’s no harm if others overhear it. Second apprentice

brother, what was Master Yu doing in Fujian? How did you see him?" Monkey-Six couldn't stay his curiosity.

"Since Big Apprentice Brother hasn't come yet," the old man said, "and the rain won't be stopping soon, there's not much to do anyway. Let me tell you the story from the beginning. Once you understand the cause and effect, when you meet someone from the Qingcheng Sword School later, at least you will be ready. Last December, when Big Apprentice Brother beat up Hou Renying and Hong Renxiong...."

"Ha-ha!" Monkey-Six suddenly burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" the girl glared at him.

Still laughing hard, Monkey-Six answered, "I am laughing at those two arrogant fellows, naming themselves Renying and Renxiong.<sup>28</sup> They're even known by the nickname 'Ying Xiong Hao Jie, the Four Aces of Qingcheng' in the Martial World. See, my name is just plain 'Lu Dayou,' and with such a plain name, trouble will never come looking for me."

"That's not true!" the girl exclaimed. "If your last name wasn't 'Lu,'<sup>29</sup> and you weren't the sixth among the apprentices, why would you have a nickname like Monkey-Six?"

"Sure, sure." Lu Dayou smiled. "Starting from this day forth, I will change my name to...."

"Don't interrupt second apprentice brother from telling the story," another apprentice cut him off.

"Alright, alright, I won't!" Lu Dayou said, but still could not help laughing.

"What are you laughing at now? You're just a nuisance!" the girl frowned.

Lu Dayou grinned. "I was just remembering how Hou Renying and Hong Renxiong rolled across the floor after being kicked by Big Apprentice Brother, and still couldn't figure out who had kicked them or why they were kicked. It turned out that Big Apprentice Brother just didn't like their names. He was shouting 'Dumb Bear Wild Pig, the Four Asses



of Qingcheng' loudly while drinking his wine. Hou and Hong of course got mad and came over to fight, but only got kicked down the stairs of the wine house for their trouble! Ha-ha-ha!"

Lin Pingzhi felt quite happy when he heard of their humiliation. Instantly, he felt closer to this Big Apprentice Brother. Although he had never met Hou Renying or Hong Renxiong, these two were fellow apprentices of Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao. When they got kicked down the stairs of the wine house, he could imagine how embarrassed they must have felt. Big Apprentice Brother had really helped him to vent his spleen.

"When Big Apprentice Brother took Hou and Hong down a peg," the old man continued, "they didn't know who Big Apprentice Brother was at the time, but later they found out. So Master Yu wrote a letter to our Master. The words were very polite, saying that he did not discipline his apprentices well and they had offended your brilliant disciple, so he specifically wrote this letter to apologize, so on and so forth."

"This fellow Yu is really cunning," Lu Dayou explained. "He wrote a letter of apology, but was actually complaining to Master. So because of the letter, Big Apprentice Brother had to kneel outside for a whole day and a whole night. Master finally let him off only after all the apprentices pleaded on his behalf."

"What do you mean 'let him off'?" The girl retorted. "He was beaten thirty strokes anyway."

"Hey, I got ten strokes along with Big Apprentice Brother," Lu Dayou said. "Ha-ha, but I saw Hou Renying and Hong Renxiong rolling down the stairs with such battered looks that the ten strokes was well worth it. Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

"Look at yourself; you don't have any remorse at all. The ten strokes were wasted!" the tall apprentice commented.

"How should I mend my ways?" Lu Dayou argued. "When Big Apprentice Brother wanted to kick them down the stairs, how was I supposed to stop him?"

"At least you could have tried to talk him out of it," the tall apprentice said. "Master had you pegged, 'Lu Dayou, well, he would never try to talk anybody out of mischief. Worse, he would add fuel to the flames. Ten strokes!' Ha-ha, Ha-ha!" All the other apprentices laughed as well.

"This time Master really wronged an innocent person." Lu Dayou protested. "Think about it. How fast can Big Apprentice Brother kick? The two 'heroes' rushed in from either side. Big Apprentice Brother just lifted his bowl and kept drinking his wine in big gulps. I shouted, 'Big Apprentice Brother, look out!' And then I heard the loud sounds of two heavy impacts, followed by the thumping sounds of the two 'big heroes' as they rolled all the way down the stairs. I really would have liked to get a better view, so I could get some pointers on the use of Big Apprentice Brother's 'Panther Tail Kick,' but I didn't even have time to look, much less time to learn. How could I have added fuel to the flames?"

"Monkey-Six," the tall apprentice said, "let me ask you, when Big Apprentice Brother was shouting 'Dumb Bear Wild Pig, The Four Asses of Qingcheng,' did you happen to shout along with him? Speak honestly!"

"Big Apprentice Brother had already started shouting, how could we, as junior apprentice brothers, not chime in to help? Are you telling me that I should have helped the Qingcheng Sword School to swear at Big Apprentice Brother?" Lu Dayou grinned.

"See, Master didn't judge you wrongly at all," The tall apprentice concluded with a laugh.

Lin Pingzhi thought, "This Monkey-Six seems to be a good guy. I wonder which school or clan they belong to?"

"We must all truly remember the words Master used to rebuke Big Apprentice Brother," the old man said. "Master said, 'In the Martial World, people have all kinds of nicknames: 'Prestige of the South', 'Wind-Chasing Hero', 'Grass Top Flying Man' and what have you. None of them

should be taken so literally. How could anyone verify the accuracy of so many names? If someone wants to be called 'Ying Xiong Hao Jie,' fine, let him be called that. If they are truly chivalrous, then we should be eager to admire them and try to make friends with them, how could we have any thoughts of hatred? But if they are not chivalrous, then their infamy would be known in the Martial World. Everyone would look down upon them, so why should we bother with them?"

Hearing second apprentice brother's words, everyone nodded in agreement.

"Still, my name 'Monkey-Six' is much better. No one will ever get mad at it," Lu Dayou murmured.

"Since Big Apprentice Brother kicked Hou and Hong down the stairs," the old man continued with a smile, "this incident was seen as a huge humiliation and embarrassment for the Qingcheng Sword School, so of course none of their people ever talked about it; even among fellow apprentices, few know about it. Master had exhorted us not to let the information out, thus avoiding conflicts. So starting from now on, let's not talk about this anymore, in case somebody overhears us and spreads the story about."

"To be frank, I really think Qingcheng Kung Fu has an undeserved reputation. Even if we did offend them, it wouldn't really matter...." Lu Dayou was tempted to express his opinion.

Before he could even finish, the old man yelled at him, "Sixth apprentice brother, if you keep talking nonsense, I will have to tell Master. Maybe you'll get another ten strokes. Do you know that Big Apprentice Brother was able to kick those two down the stairs with a 'Panther Tail Kick' only because: firstly, he launched the attack unexpectedly; secondly, he is an outstanding apprentice in our school, and other apprentices are no match for him. Do you think you have the skills to kick those two down the stairs?"

"Don't compare me to Big Apprentice Brother," Lu Dayou said, sticking his tongue out and waving his hands.

"The Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School, Master Yu, is really a martial genius," the old man said with dead seriousness, "whoever underestimates him will surely be in trouble, sooner or later. Little Apprentice Sister, you have seen Master Yu before. What do you think of him?"

"Master Yu? He was so terrible, he...he frightens me; I don't...don't want to see him again," the girl exclaimed. Her voice trembled slightly, and seemed to contain traces of fear.

"Master Yu was frightening? Did you see him kill somebody?" Lu Dayou asked.

The girl shrank and did not answer the question.

"On the day our Master received the letter from Master Yu, he was so angry that he inflicted those harsh punishments on Big Apprentice Brother and sixth apprentice brother. The next day he wrote a letter and told me to send it to Mount Qingcheng...", the old man said.

"So that was what you were doing that day when you left in such a hurry. You were actually heading to Mount Qingcheng," several apprentices cried out.

"Yep," the old man nodded, "at that time Master told me to not mention it to any fellow apprentices to avoid additional incidents."

"What additional incidents? Respectful Master was just being careful. Things the Master asks us to do of course are things with good reasoning behind them. Who would agree otherwise?" Lu Dayou stated.

"What do you know?" The tall apprentice cut in. "If second apprentice brother had told you about it, you would surely have passed the message on to Big Apprentice Brother. Although Big Apprentice Brother wouldn't disobey Master's orders, it is very possible he would find some unusual ways to make trouble for the Qingcheng Sword School."

"Third apprentice brother is right," the old man agreed. "Big Apprentice Brother has many friends in the Martial World. If he really wants something done, he doesn't

necessarily have to do it himself. Master told me that the letter contained all kinds of apologetic words to Master Yu, saying that his wayward apprentice was too ill-mannered; how he found the acts reprehensible; how he should have expelled the apprentice from the school, but if he did so, everyone in the Martial World would think that conflict existed between your respectful school and our school, which wouldn't be a good thing; now he had those two wayward apprentices...." He gave Lu Dayou a glance at these words.

"So I am a wayward apprentice as well!" Lu Dayou was displeased.

"Is placing you at the same level as Big Apprentice Brother a disgrace for you?" the girl asked.

Lu Dayou immediately became very happy. "You're right! Get me some wine, get me some wine!" he yelled.

The teashop only had tea for sale, not wine. The waiter rushed to the table and said, "Ha you all, our teashop only has Dragon-Well, Dongting-Spring, Puer, Iron-Buddha. Ha you all, we don't sell wine, you all." The people of the Hengyang and Hengshan region had their own special accent, and this waiter was no exception.

"Ha you all! So ha your all's shop doesn't sell wine? Then I won't drink ha your all's wine. Ha you all!" Lu Dayou mimicked.

"Sure, sure, ha you all!" the waiter answered. He then filled all the teapots with boiled water.

The old man continued, "Master said in the letter that he had already had the two wayward apprentices harshly punished; he would have made the two go to Mount Qingcheng themselves to offer a humble apology, but the two wayward apprentices were hurt so badly from their punishment, they could not even walk; that's why he sent his second apprentice Lao Denuo to take the rebuke in their stead; this incident was solely caused by the wayward apprentices, he hopes Master Yu does not take too much offense for the sake of the good relationship between the

Qingcheng Sword School and the Huashan Sword School; when they meet in the future, he would apologize to Master Yu personally.”

“So your name is Lao Denuo and you are from the Huashan Sword School, part of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance,” Lin Pingzhi thought. When he considered the words “for the sake of the good relationship between the two” in the letter, he could feel his heart beating faster. “This Lao Denuo and the ugly girl have seen me twice. I sure hope they don’t recognize me today.”

Lao Denuo’s voice rose again, “After I arrived at Mount Qingcheng, Hou Renying did not seem to hold a grudge, but Hong Renxiong was still mad about it, and ridiculed me several times to try and pick a fight....”

“Damn! Those Qingcheng fellows are aggressive! Second apprentice brother, if he wants a fight, give him a fight! What are we afraid of? I know that fellow Hong is no match for you,” Lu Dayou said.

“Master sent me there to apologize, not to make trouble,” Lao Denuo exclaimed. “So I swallowed my pride and stayed on Mount Qingcheng for six days. I was not received by Master Yu until the seventh day.”

“Humph! Harsh attitude, huh! Second apprentice brother, I bet those six days and nights on Mount Qingcheng probably weren’t too enjoyable!” Lu Dayou interrupted again.

“There certainly was a lot of baiting,” Lao Denuo said, “but I knew that Master sent me on this not because I was any better in Kung Fu skills or the like, but because I am older, so I’d do a better job staying calm. The longer I could hold my anger, the better I could accomplish the mission. Those Qingcheng people didn’t realize that keeping me waiting for six days in the Pine-Wind Temple of Mount Qingcheng wasn’t actually doing them any good.

“During my stay in the Pine-Wind Temple, I got really bored, since they wouldn’t let me see Master Yu. On the third day, I got up early to take a walk and secretly worked on

some breathing exercises to prevent my skills from getting rusty. I was wandering around when I happened to pass by the exercise field at the rear of the Pine-Wind Temple. With a glance, I saw dozens of Qingcheng apprentices, practicing their Kung Fu. Of course in the Martial World, it is considered a taboo to watch others practice their Kung Fu, so I turned around to go back to my room. But even with such a quick glance, I felt something suspicious was going on. Each of the apprentices was using a sword, and was obviously practicing the same set of sword moves. Each one seemed to have only just learned the set, because as they practiced, their moves looked quite stiff. But what sword technique was it? I couldn't tell with my one glance very easily.

"After I went back to my room, I mulled over what I saw, and the more I thought about it, the more suspicious I became. Qingcheng Sword School has been well known for ages. Many apprentices have been part of the school for ten or twenty years, and each apprentice would have joined at a different time, so why was everyone learning the same sword technique at the same time? Particularly since among the dozens of apprentices were the so-called 'Four Aces of Qingcheng': Hou Renying, Hong Renxiong, Yu Renhao, and Luo Renjie. Fellow apprentice brothers, if it were you that saw this scene, what would you think?"

"Maybe the Qingcheng Sword School just acquired a secret sword art manual, or maybe Master Yu just invented a new set of sword techniques, and was teaching it to his apprentices," the apprentice with the abacus suggested.

"I was thinking the same thing in the beginning," Lao Denuo replied, "but after I thought about it more carefully, I realized that something was not quite right. With Master Yu's understanding of the sword arts, if these were newly created moves, then they must have been really outstanding moves. On the other hand, if they did acquire an ancient secret sword art manual, the moves it contained must have been excellent; otherwise he wouldn't have even bothered looking

at it or asked his apprentices to practice them. New sword techniques could undo the training they had already undergone. If the moves were excellent moves, then the average apprentice wouldn't be able to understand them easily; he would have most likely chosen three or four of his top apprentices to try them out, not have over forty apprentices learn it at the same time. That's more like having someone opening a Kung Fu school for mere profit, not something a Master of a noble Martial Arts School would do.

"The next morning, I went to the rear of the temple again and strolled past the exercise field. Once again, they were practicing the same sword techniques. I did not dare to stop and watch. With a quick glance, I managed to memorize two of the moves. I figured I could ask the Master's opinion regarding them later when I got back. By that time, Master Yu still hadn't allowed me to see him, so naturally I suspected the Qingcheng Sword School was harboring a lot of hatred toward our Huashan Sword School. Perhaps they were practicing these new moves so they could use them against us. I kept telling myself I'd better be more careful."

"Second apprentice brother, could they have been practicing a new sword formation?" the tall apprentice asked.

"That was possible," Lao Denuo said, "but they were mostly practicing in pairs; and the attacking side was using all the same type of moves as the defending side. It didn't look like a sword formation to me. The morning after that, I walked by the exercise field again, but this time the whole field was completely empty. I knew that they were trying to hide something from me, so my suspicions were aroused even more. I was just wandering by and happened to glance in their direction from far away. What secret could I have seen? It seemed that they were really practicing a powerful set of sword techniques to counter us, otherwise why would they worry so much about what I had seen?"

"That night, I lay on my bed and couldn't sleep, thinking over the whole matter. Then I heard the dim clash of weapons



coming from a distance. I was startled. Did some powerful enemy just invade the Pine-Wind Temple? My first thought was that perhaps Big Apprentice Brother had gotten angry because of the punishment he received from our Master, and decided to attack the Pine-Wind Temple. He was just one person, and would not be able to fight the people of the entire temple; I had to go help him. I did not bring any weapon with me when I went to Mount Qingcheng, and in my hurry, I could not stop to find a sword either, so I had to rush out with just my bare hands...."

"Amazing!" Lu Dayou praised. "Second apprentice brother, you have great courage! I would never dare to go fight Master Yu, the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School, with only my bare hands."

"Monkey-Six, what are you babbling about?" Lao Denuo yelled angrily. "I didn't say that I went to fight Master Yu with bare hands. I was just worried about Big Apprentice Brother's safety, so although I knew it was dangerous, I just had to go. Would you have me hide under my covers like a coward?" All the apprentices laughed when they heard this.

"Here I am showering you with praise and admiration, and you get angry at me?" Lu Dayou made a face.

"Thanks, but your kind of compliments don't sit well with me," Lao Denuo replied.

"Second apprentice brother, go on with the story. Don't pay any attention to Monkey-Six," several other apprentices urged.

Lao Denuo continued, "So I got up quietly and went in the direction of the sounds. Hearing the clash of weapons getting louder and louder, my heart beat faster and faster. I thought, 'The two of us are deep in the enemy's lair now. Big Apprentice Brother has excellent Kung Fu skills. He might be able to escape without injury. But for me, it's a different story. I am in big trouble now.' I heard the sound of weapons float out from the Back Hall. All kinds of lights and candles were lit there making it seem like broad daylight. I crouched down to

sneak in closer, and looked inside through the cracks of the window. Then I gasped and almost burst into laughter. It turned out I was just imagining things. Because Master Yu hadn't met with me for so many days, my imagination got carried away, and I imagined the worst thing that could happen. It wasn't Big Apprentice Brother coming to make trouble after all! There were two pairs inside practicing their sword moves. One pair was of Hou Renying and Hong Renxiong, the other pair was of Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao."

"Ha, the apprentices of the Qingcheng Sword School really work hard, not even rest at night," Lu Dayou mocked. "I guess this is what they call 'sharpening one's spear only before going into a battle,' or 'no joss sticks in fair weather, but clutching the feet of Buddha in crisis.'"

Lao Denuo gave Lu Dayou a glare and continued, "In the middle of the Back Hall sat a short Taoist priest in a blue Taoist robe. He was about fifty years old and had a thin face. By the look of him, one could tell that he weighed no more than eighty pounds. It was said in the Martial World that the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School was a short Taoist priest, but if I had not seen him with my own eyes, I wouldn't have expected him to be so short, and wouldn't have believed that he was the famous Master Yu. There were many apprentices standing around him, attentively watching the four practicing. After watching a couple of moves, I knew instantly that they were using the new moves they had been practicing over the last couple of days.

"I knew it was very dangerous for me to be there at that time. If the people from Qingcheng Sword School had found me, not only would I be harshly punished, but the reputation of Huashan Sword School would also have been hurt badly if the news got out. Although Master punished Big Apprentice Brother harshly for kicking the top two of 'The Four Aces of Qingcheng' down the stairs, saying that he had violated the school rules and caused all kinds of trouble, and offended friends, in Master's heart, I believe he was actually glad. At

least Big Apprentice Brother had gained good publicity for our school. 'How can they be the Four Aces of Qingcheng? They couldn't even fend off a single kick from the senior apprentice of the Huashan Sword School.' But if I got caught sneaking around, digging up other people's secrets, it would look worse than stealing money. And when I got back to Huashan, Master would most likely have me expelled from the Huashan Sword School.

"But seeing those people practicing so hard, I really thought it might have had something to do with our school. How could I just turn around and leave? I just kept telling myself, 'I'll just watch a couple of more moves before leaving.' But after watching a couple, I watched another couple, and so it went on and on. The sword moves they used were so unusual. I had never seen anything like them before in my life. But if someone claimed that these moves had some kind of great power, I couldn't agree. I wondered, 'This set of sword techniques is nothing special, why would the Qingcheng Sword School want to practice it so diligently, day and night? Could this set of sword techniques be to counter our Huashan sword arts?' It didn't look like it!

"After watching several more moves, I dared not continue watching anymore, so I sneaked away and went back to my room while the four were still fighting intensely. If I had waited till the four stopped fighting and the noises ended, there would have been no way for me to get away. With his superior skills, Master Yu would have found me out after my first step outside the hall.

"In the following two nights, the sound of swords ringing against each other kept coming from the distance, but I dared not go and watch any more. To be honest, if I had known that they were practicing sword fighting in front of Master Yu, I would never have dared to go there at all. The first time was just an accident. Just now sixth apprentice brother praised my courage; I did not deserve such praise. If you had seen my face that night, you would have known how

terrified I was, and you'd have called me the number one coward."

"No way! No way!" Lu Dayou objected. "Second apprentice brother, you'd be at most number two. If it were I, I wouldn't have to worry about being found out by Master Yu. I would have been so scared that my entire body would have become stiff; I would stop breathing and not be able to move an inch; pretty much no different from a zombie. No matter how outstanding Master Yu's Kung Fu skills are, he would have never known that there was a hero named Lu Dayou hiding outside his window." The apprentices broke into uproarious laughter.

"Later Master Yu finally granted me an audience," Lao Denuo continued. "He spoke in a very polite manner, saying that Master really didn't have to punish Big Apprentice Brother so harshly. The Qingcheng Sword School and the Huashan Sword School have always maintained a good relationship. The apprentices were only roughhousing with each other, just like children playing practical jokes with each other. The parents should never take such matters too seriously. That night he invited me to dinner. The following morning when I was leaving, Master Yu saw me off all the way to the gate of the Pine-Wind Temple. Since I was the apprentice, I of course, knelt down and kowtowed. Right after I knelt down on my left knee, Master Yu lifted his right hand slightly and lifted me right up. His power was amazing! It felt as if I had suddenly lost all of my strength and my body was floating in the air. If he had wanted to toss me thirty feet or simply flip me over seven or eight times, I would not have had any strength to defend myself.

"Master Yu smiled slightly and asked, 'How many more years than you has your senior apprentice brother been an apprentice of your Master? You had some prior martial arts skills before you became an apprentice to your Master, hadn't you?'

“I was still trying to catch my breath after experiencing his grip, so I had to wait a while before answering, ‘Yes, I learned some martial arts skills before joining the Huashan Sword School. At the time I became an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, Big Apprentice Brother had been an apprentice for three years.’

“Master Yu smiled again and said, ‘Three years more, hmm, three years more.’”

“What did he mean by ‘three years more’?” the girl asked.

“He wore an odd expression. I guess he must have been thinking that my Kung Fu skills were mediocre, so that even if Big Apprentice Brother had studied three more years than I did, he couldn’t have been too much better,” Lao Denuo shrugged.

The girl hummed and then fell silent.

“After I went back to Mount Huashan, I gave Master the reply letter from Master Yu,” Lao Denuo went on. “The letter was written in a very polite and modest manner, so Master was very pleased after reading it. Then, he asked about different things happening in the Pine-Wind Temple, so I told him about that night the Qingcheng apprentices practiced. Master asked me to show him a couple of the moves. I only remembered seven or eight of them, so I imitated the moves. Master said immediately when he saw them, ‘Those are moves of the Evil-Resisting Sword Art of the Fortune Prestige Escort House Lin family!’”

When Lin Pingzhi heard this, his body trembled!

# **Chapter 3: Rescue**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The door curtain was lifted, and then a little nun walked quietly into the hall. She was possessed of grace and beauty. No one would have argued that she was a perfect creation of Heaven. Although wrapped in a big and loose nun's robe, the curves of her body were apparent from her graceful movements. She walked till she stood in front of Dingyi then knelt down gracefully.**

Lao Denuo continued with his story, "So I asked Master, 'Is this 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' something very powerful? Why would the Qingcheng Sword School practice it so intensely?'

"Master did not answer right away. He closed his eyes for a long while and then said, 'Denuo, before you became my disciple, you had already spent much time in the Martial World. In that time, what did you hear of the Chief Master of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, Lin Zhennan?'

"I answered, 'Our friends in the Martial World said that Lin Zhennan was not stingy when socializing with others; he treated his friends well. Everybody liked him and left the goods he escorted alone out of respect. But with regard to his real Kung Fu skills, I am not sure.'

"Master said, 'Right! Over the last generation, the Fortune Prestige Escort House has been successful primarily because people in the Martial World treated Lin Zhennan like a friend. Did you ever hear that Master Yu's teacher, Evergreen, was defeated by Lin Yuantu's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' during his youth?'

"I was lost. 'Lin...Lin Yuantu? Was he Lin Zhennan's father?' I asked.

"'No,' Master answered, 'Lin Yuantu was Lin Zhennan's grandfather. He was the original founder of the Fortune Prestige Escort House. In those days when Lin Yuantu founded the Escort House with the seventy-two moves of 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art,' none of the heterodox members of the Martial World was a match for him. Because of his great



fame at that time, even orthodox members of the Martial World went to challenge him. Evergreen was one of them, and thus was defeated by several moves of the Evil-Resisting Sword Art.'

"I asked, 'So the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' is truly very powerful?'

"Master said, 'The news that Evergreen lost the fight was kept secret by both sides, so nobody in the Martial World knew about it. However, Evergreen was a very good friend of our Grand Master and had once mentioned it to him. He considered this one of the greatest humiliations in his life, but knowing that he would never be able to defeat Lin Yuantu, he was never able to settle the score with him. Grand Master studied the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' together with him in order to identify flaws in this sword art. The seventy-two moves looked plain, but there were many profound mysteries locked within that no one could fathom, which allowed the moves to suddenly become very swift. The two of them studied it for several months, but still could not devise a way to counter it. At that time, I was a mere teenager who had just become an apprentice. I served them tea at those sessions and was able to watch the moves everyday, so when you demonstrated the moves, I knew they were from the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art.' Ah, time flows like a stream. That was a long time ago!'"

Ever since Lin Pingzhi had been beaten up by the Qingcheng apprentices without being able to defend himself, he had completely lost confidence in his family's Kung Fu. All he wanted was to learn from a good teacher to seek revenge later. Now hearing Lao Denuo speak of the great prestige and fame of his great grandfather, Lin Yuantu, he was greatly encouraged. Their family's "Evil-Resisting Sword Art" was really nothing to scoff at. Years ago, even the masters of the Qingcheng and Huashan sword schools could not defeat it. But if this was so, why couldn't his father defeat those

Qingcheng apprentices? Perhaps his father did not learn the secret and magic parts of the sword art.

Then he heard Lao Denuo say, "I then asked Master, 'Did Evergreen ever get his revenge?'"

"Master said, 'He only lost a challenged fight. That doesn't require revenge. Besides, Lin Yuantu had been famous for years and was considered an admirable senior master. Evergreen was just a little Taoist priest who barely finished training. It wasn't a big deal for a young lad to lose to a senior master. After Grand Master comforted him, they never mentioned the incident again. Evergreen died at the age of thirty-six. Maybe he could never put the incident behind him, and finally died of depression. Now, decades later, why would Yu Canghai suddenly make all of his apprentices practice the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art?' Denuo, what's your opinion on this?'"

"I said, 'It seemed that everyone in the Pine-Wind Temple was quite serious about practicing; could Master Yu be planning to mount a large-scale attack against the Fortune Prestige Escort House to seek revenge for the past generation?'"

"Master nodded and said, 'I think so too. Evergreen was a narrow-minded person who thought highly of himself. He must have taken his defeat to heart. He probably left some kind of order to Yu Canghai before he passed away. Lin Yuantu died before Evergreen, so if Yu Canghai were to avenge his teacher, he could only go after Lin Zhongxiong, Lin Yuantu's son. But for some reason, he waited till now to start the attack. Yu Canghai is shrewd and deep, and always plots before attacking. There's going to be a big fight between the Qingcheng Sword School and the Fortune Prestige Escort House.'

"I asked Master, 'So in your opinion, who has a better chance of winning the fight?'"

"Master smiled and said, 'Yu Canghai's Kung Fu skills have surpassed his master, Evergreen's. Lin Zhennan's Kung

Fu skills, although outsiders have no idea, are probably inferior to his grandfather's. One had advanced and one had slipped back. In addition, the Qingcheng Sword School hides in the dark while the Fortune Prestige Escort House is exposed in the light; before the real fight even begins, the Fortune Prestige Escort House already has a seventy percent chance of losing. If Lin Zhennan were to get the information early and invite the Golden Blade Wang Yuanba in Luoyang to help out, then they might be able to put up a decent fight. Denuo, do you want to go watch the fun?'

"I, of course, agreed joyfully. Then the Master taught me a couple of sword moves that the Qingcheng Sword School is quite fond of, as a means of protection."

"What?" Lu Dayou jumped up. "How come Master knows moves of Qingcheng's sword art? Ah, I see. Years ago when Evergreen practiced with Grand Master, he had to use Qingcheng's sword art to counter the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art,' so Master saw them from the side."

"Sixth apprentice brother," Lao Denuo said, "as apprentices, let's not speculate on the origin of Master's Kung Fu skills. Master told me not to let any other apprentices know about this, so the information wouldn't leak out. But Little Apprentice Sister was quite clever and somehow heard about it. She nagged Master into letting her go with me. We disguised ourselves as grandpa and granddaughter selling wine outside Fuzhou, and then everyday we would sneak into the Fortune Prestige Escort House to see what was going on. We didn't see much, other than Lin Zhennan teaching his son sword arts. When Little Apprentice Sister saw the sword art, she shook her head and said to me, 'Is this really the renowned 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art?' It's more like the Evil-Resisting-Not Sword Art. When evil comes, this Young Master Lin better hide far away.'"

Lin Pingzhi's face turned red at the laughter of the Huashan Sword School apprentices. He was so ashamed that he wished there was a hole he could crawl into. "So the two

of them had been watching us in our Escort House and we knew nothing about it. We are really impotent." He couldn't help feeling very depressed.

"Not many days after we arrived in Fuzhou, apprentices of the Qingcheng Sword School drifted in one after another," Lao Denuo continued with the story. "The first two that arrived were Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao. They started sneaking into the Escort House everyday to explore the place. Little Apprentice Sister and I wanted to avoid bumping into them, so we stopped going there. It was quite a coincidence when one day, that Young Master Lin came to patronize our 'Great Wine Shop.' Little Apprentice Sister just had to bring out some wine for them. At first we thought he had found us out and intentionally came to let us know it. But when I spoke to him, I learned that he was still quite clueless. That playboy didn't know a thing and was no different from a retard. Then, guess what happened? The two most useless apprentices of the Qingcheng Sword School, Yu Renyan and Jia Renda happened to come to our 'Great Wine Shop' as well...."

"Second apprentice brother, the 'Great Wine Shop' Little Apprentice Sister and you opened must have had a booming business with all kinds of revenue pouring in. You probably made a fortune in Fujian, didn't you?" Lu Dayou applauded.

"Sure! Second apprentice brother has become quite a wealthy man now, and thanks to his luck, I was able to pick up a few crumbs as well!" the girl grinned. Everyone burst into laughter.

"Although that Young Master Lin was terrible with his Kung Fu skills and not even good enough to be Little Apprentice Sister's student, he did have some integrity," Lao Denuo said. "Yu Renyan, the youngest and most useless son of Yu Canghai, was so blind that he started teasing and making fun of Little Apprentice Sister. Then the Young Master Lin stepped in and tried to protect us...."

Lin Pingzhi felt both ashamed and irritated. "So the Qingcheng Sword School had deliberately planned the attacks on our Escort House, seeking revenge for their defeat in the previous generation. And the group that came to Fuzhou consisted of far more than just four. Whether I killed Yu Renyan or not didn't matter at all." He was so disturbed that he didn't really listen to Lao Denuo describe how he killed Yu Renyan. But he could hear laugh after laugh; they must have been laughing at how clumsy he had been when he tried to defend himself.

Then he heard Lao Denuo say, "That night, Little Apprentice Sister and I went back to the Fortune Prestige Escort House to check things out, and saw that Hou Renying, Hong Renxiong, and other apprentices led by Master Yu had already arrived. We were afraid to be seen by the people of Qingcheng Sword School, so we just stood far away to observe. We saw them killing the escorts of the Escort House one by one, including the ones sent out to obtain help. Dead bodies were sent back to the Escort House one after another; they were merciless. At that moment, I thought to myself: The whole thing was just because Evergreen, someone from the last generation of Qingcheng, lost to Lin Yuantu in a challenge sword fight. If Master Yu wanted to settle the score, all he needed to do was to challenge and defeat Lin Zhennan and his son in a sword fight. Why did he behave so maliciously? He must have wanted to avenge Yu Renyan, but why didn't they do anything to the Lin couple and Lin Pingzhi, and only forced them to leave the Escort House? Right after the remaining escorts and the Lin family fled the Escort House, Master Yu went in. Then he sat smugly on the chief's chair; starting then, the Fortune Prestige Escort House belonged to the Qingcheng Sword School."

"Qingcheng Sword School wanted to get into the escorting business. Master Yu wanted to be the Chief Master Escort!" Lu Dayou exclaimed. Everyone laughed.

"The Qingcheng people had watched the Lin family disguise themselves," Lao Denuo went on. "Fang Renzhi, Yu Renhao, and Jia Renda got the order to go after them and bring them back. Little Apprentice Sister insisted on following them to watch the events unfold, so we followed the bunch of them. When the Lin family stopped by a small restaurant in the mountains south of Fuzhou, Fang Renzhi, Yu Renhao, and Jia Renda showed themselves and captured the three."

"Little Apprentice Sister said, 'It was all because of me that the Young Master Lin killed Yu Renyan. We cannot just walk away like this.'

"I tried my best to change her mind and said that if we came out and attacked the Qingcheng Sword School, we would damage the relationship between the Qingcheng Sword School and the Huashan Sword School. And since Master Yu was in Fuzhou, we also might get in big trouble."

"Second apprentice brother is old, so of course he wanted to be careful and doesn't care much for action. Little Apprentice Sister must have been very disappointed," Lu Dayou speculated.

"Little Apprentice Sister was so enthusiastic that it was hard to disappoint her even if I wanted to." Lao Denuo smiled. "So Little Apprentice Sister first went into the kitchen and cracked Jia Renda's head. When he started screaming and lured Fang and Yu away, she circled to the front to rescue Young Master Lin and let him escape."

"Terrific! Terrific!" Lu Dayou applauded. "I see! Little Apprentice Sister wasn't just saving that fellow Lin; she had something else in mind. Great! Great!"

"What other things did I have in mind? You're talking nonsense again!" the girl said.

"Since I was beaten by Master because of the Qingcheng Sword School, Little Apprentice Sister was unhappy, so she beat up the people of the Qingcheng Sword School to vent

my anger. Thank you very much....” Lu Dayou stood up and saluted the girl.

“Monkey-Six apprentice brother, you are welcome,” the girl smiled and saluted back.

“Little Apprentice Sister beat up the Qingcheng apprentice to vent someone’s anger, but I am not sure if that someone was you. It wasn’t just you, Monkey-Six, who got beaten by Master,” the apprentice with the abacus said with a broad grin.

“This time sixth apprentice brother is right,” Lao Denuo smiled. “Little Apprentice Sister really beat up Jia for sixth apprentice brother’s sake. Later if Master asks about this, she will still say so.”

“This...this is an honor I don’t want. Don’t drag me into it and get me another ten strokes of the stick,” Lu Dayou exclaimed, waving his hands.

“So didn’t Fang Renzhi and Yu Renhao chase you?” the tall apprentice asked.

“Of course they did,” the girl answered, “but second apprentice brother had learned some moves of the Qingcheng sword art, and with only the one move called ‘Swan Goose in the Sky,’ he sent their swords into the sky. Too bad second apprentice brother masked his face with a black cloth. I’ll bet that even now Fang and Yu still don’t realize that they lost to the Huashan Sword School.”

“It is better that way,” Lao Denuo said. “Otherwise, there would have been more trouble. In a straight test of skills I may not be able to win over Fang and Yu, but because I used moves from the Qingcheng sword art so unexpectedly and attacked the flaw in their technique, the two were startled, and because of that, we won again this time.”

The apprentices all agreed that if Big Apprentice Brother had known about this, he would have been very happy and excited indeed.

It started raining more and more heavily; raindrops bounced off rooftops and street surfaces like peas. A vendor,

carrying a pot of wonton and his cooking utensils balanced on the ends of a pole, appeared from the rain and stopped under the eaves of the teashop to take shelter. The old man started to knock on a bamboo block to attract customers. Hot steam was coming out of his pot.

The Huashan apprentices had been hungry for quite a while, so when they saw the wonton vendor, they were all quite pleased.

"Hey, make nine servings of wonton for us, please. Extra eggs," Lu Dayou shouted.

"Yes, sir!" the old man answered, and then opened the pot lid and threw the wontons into the hot soup. Moments later, five bowls of wonton were ready for the apprentices.

Lu Dayou was well behaved. He gave the first bowl to second apprentice brother, Lao Denuo, the second bowl to third apprentice brother, Liang Fa, and the next two bowls to fourth apprentice brother, Shi Daizi, and fifth apprentice brother, Gao Genming, respectively. He should have taken the next bowl, but he put it in front of Little Apprentice Sister instead.

"Little Apprentice Sister, after you," he said.

The girl had been teasing him all the time, calling him Monkey-Six and all, but when he gave the wonton to her, she stood up and replied respectfully, "Thanks! Apprentice brother!"

Lin Pingzhi observed everything from his vantage point by the side, and thought that they had very strict school rules; it was okay to joke around, but all had to abide by the rule of seniority.

Lao Denuo and the others began to eat, but the girl waited till Lu Dayou and all the other apprentice brothers had their bowls of wonton before eating her own.

"Second apprentice brother, you were just talking about how Master Yu took over the Fortune Prestige Escort House. What happened after that?" Liang Fa asked.



"After Little Apprentice Sister rescued that Young Master Lin," Lao Denuo replied, "she wanted to follow them secretly and wait for a chance to rescue the Lin couple. I pleaded with her, 'Yu Renyan offended you the other day, and the Young Master Lin helped you. You felt gratitude and rescued him, that's enough payback already. The score between the Qingcheng Sword School and the Fortune Prestige Escort House came from the previous generation; why should we interfere?' Little Apprentice Sister finally agreed. Then the two of us went back to Fuzhou and saw over ten Qingcheng apprentices guarding the Fortune Prestige Escort House.

"That was somewhat strange. Everyone in the Escort House had fled in a rush; even the Lin couple was gone; what was the Qingcheng Sword School afraid of? Little Apprentice Sister and I could not figure it out and became quite curious, so we decided to investigate. We figured that since Qingcheng apprentices was guarding the place so tightly, it would be very hard to get in at night, so we sneaked into the garden at dusk while they were changing shifts for dinner. After we got into the Escort House, we saw many Qingcheng apprentices busily rummaging through chests and cupboards; some were taking down walls; others were digging up the ground. It seemed that they had turned the entire Escort House upside down. There was gold and treasure the Escorts did not have time to take with them, but those were just thrown to one side and ignored. They must have been looking for something very important, but what was it?"

"The Evil-Resisting Sword Art Manuscript!" four Huashan apprentices said almost in unison.

"Correct!" Lao Denuo said. "Little Apprentice Sister and I came to that same conclusion. It was obvious that they started searching right after they took over the Fortune Prestige Escort House. Seeing them all searching and sweating so hard, we knew that they hadn't gotten any results."

“So did they find it eventually?” Lu Dayou asked.

“Little Apprentice Sister and I both wanted to see the outcome,” Lao Denuo said, “but those Qingcheng people searched so thoroughly that they didn’t even forget to search the outhouses. Little Apprentice Sister and I really had nowhere to hide and had to sneak away.”

“Second apprentice brother, do you think Master Yu was making a fuss over a trivial matter by going there and leading the operation himself?” fifth apprentice Gao Genming asked.

Lao Denuo answered, “Master Yu’s teacher had lost to Lin Yuantu’s ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art;’ whether Lin Zhennan was an unworthy descendant or an even stronger opponent, outsiders would not have known. It might not have been proper for Master Yu to only send a couple of apprentices to settle the score. He went to Fuzhou himself and also urged all his apprentices to practice the sword art, then prepared in advance to start the attack. I wouldn’t really call this making a fuss. But from what I saw, I think that for him, revenge was only of secondary importance, while finding that sword art manuscript was the main priority.”

“Second apprentice brother, you saw them practicing the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ in Pine-Wind Temple. If they had already known how to use this sword art, why bother looking for the sword art manuscript? Perhaps they were looking for something else,” fourth apprentice Shi Daizi suggested.

“I don’t think so.” Lao Denuo shook his head. “What else besides secret martial art techniques could have interested Master Yu, a master of martial arts, so much that he would be willing to spend so much effort on it? Later at the Yushan town in Jiangxi Province, Little Apprentice Sister and I met them again and heard Master Yu asking messenger apprentices from other provinces whether they had found the thing. He looked worried, so it seemed that nobody had actually found it yet.”

Shi Daizi still could not understand. He scratched his head and asked, "They already knew how to use this set of sword arts, why would they bother looking for the sword art manuscript? How strange!"

"Think about it, fourth apprentice brother," Lao Denuo explained. "Years ago, Lin Yuantu was able to defeat Evergreen; the sword art must have been truly outstanding. But not only was the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' that Evergreen remembered nothing out of the ordinary, Master Yu also saw with his own eyes that the Kung Fu skills of the Lin family were not even worth mentioning. Something was just not making sense."

"What do you mean?" Shi Daizi asked.

"There must be some secrets to the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' of the Lin Family," Lao Denuo exclaimed. "Although the moves appear average, the power of the sword art could be very strong. And Lin Zhennan did not get to learn these secrets."

Shi Daizi thought for a while and nodded, "That's right. But secret methods for sword arts are normally only passed down by one's master orally. Lin Yuantu has been dead for decades, and even if they could find his coffin and dig up his body, it wouldn't help them at all."

"The secret code for our own sword art is taught orally by Master in spoken words, with no written parts, but not every school or clan necessarily has to be like that," Lao Denuo said.

"Second apprentice brother, I still don't understand," Shi Daizi said. "It was logical that before their attack they would want the manuscript for the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art.' Know the enemy and know yourself; this way, you can win every battle. They wanted to defeat the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art,' so it was better if they knew the secret within the sword art. But the Qingcheng Sword School has already captured the Lin couple, and the Headquarters and Escort House branches have all been wiped out. What score is there left to settle?"

Even if there really was a powerful secret in the sword art, why should they bother looking for it?"

"Fourth brother, what is your evaluation of Qingcheng's Kung Fu compared to the Kung Fu of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance?" Lao Denuo asked.

"I don't know," Shi Daizi answered. After a short while he said, "Perhaps not as good."

"That's right, probably not as good as ours," Lao Denuo said. "Think about it. Master Yu is a conceited, arrogant man. Doesn't he want his fame to be greater than everyone else in the Martial World? If the Lin Family really had some kind of secret technique, something which could change the average sword moves of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art' into something very powerful, then if they used this secret technique with their Qingcheng sword art, what would happen?"

Shi Daizi thought for a long while and suddenly struck the table heavily as he stood up and shouted, "I see! Yu Canghai wants his Qingcheng sword art to be number one in the Martial World!"

Right at that moment, sounds of footsteps floated in from the street outside. Everyone in the teashop turned and saw a group of people rush toward the teashop in quick steps. From the way they ran, one could tell that they were all Martial people. They were all dressed in oilcloth raincoats, and as they got closer, everyone saw that it was a group of Buddhist nuns.

The leading old nun was a tall one, and stopping right in front of the teashop, she shouted, "Linghu Chong, come out!"

Lao Denuo and the other apprentices recognized the old nun. She was Sister Dingyi, the Master of the White-Cloud Nunnery atop Mount Heng-Shan. She was also the junior apprentice sister of Sister Dingxian, the Head Master of the Heng-Shan Sword School. Not only was she a famous Master within the Heng-Shan Sword School, she was also a renowned master of great fame in the Martial World, and all

Martial people considered her a tough fighter. All the Huashan apprentices stood up and saluted her respectfully.

"We hereby pay our respect to Uncle-Master!"<sup>30</sup> Lao Denuo said loudly.

Sister Dingyi glanced over everyone and yelled in a husky voice, "Where is Linghu Chong hiding? Get his ass out here!" Her voice was even huskier than that of a man.

"Uncle-Master, senior apprentice brother Linghu is not here. We have been waiting for him, and he hasn't arrived yet," Lao Denuo replied.

"So this Big Apprentice Brother they were talking about is named Linghu Chong. He really seems like a troublemaker. What did he do to make this old nun so mad?" Lin Pingzhi thought to himself.

Sister Dingyi surveyed the teashop and stopped in front of the girl's face. "Are you Lingshan? Why are you disguised like that? To scare people?" she asked.

"There were some bad men who wanted to harass me, so I disguised myself to hide for a while," the girl answered with a smile.

Dingyi gave a snort. "The rules of your Huashan Sword School are getting looser and looser. Your father is too lax with his apprentices, and that is exactly what encourages them to cause trouble wherever they go. When I finish my business here, I'm going to have to go to Mount Huashan myself, and discuss this with him."

"Uncle-Master, please don't do that!" Lingshan begged worriedly. "Big Apprentice Brother just got punished with thirty strokes from Father recently. He was wounded so badly that he could barely walk. If you talk to my father, he might get another sixty strokes of the stick. That would kill him!"

"The earlier that animal gets killed, the better. Lingshan, how can you lie to my face! Linghu Chong could barely walk? If he could barely walk, how did he manage to kidnap my little apprentice?" Sister Dingyi bellowed.

Hearing those words, the faces of the Huashan apprentices turned pale with horror.

Lingshan almost cried. "Uncle-Master," she said hurriedly, "that's impossible! No matter how bold Big Apprentice Brother is, he would never dare to offend fellow apprentice sisters of your respectful school. Somebody must be making up stories to sow discord with Uncle-Master."

"You still deny it? Yiguang, what did the apprentice from the Taishan Sword School tell you?" Dingyi barked.

A middle-aged nun stepped forward. "Apprentice brothers from the Taishan Sword School said that Priest Tian-Song saw apprentice brother Linghu and junior sister Yilin drinking together in a wine house in the town of Hengyang. The wine house was called something like Huiyan House. Junior sister Yilin had obviously been seized by apprentice brother Linghu and coerced into drinking the wine. She looked...looked very upset. And drinking together with them was that...that...villain who stops at no evil...Tian...Tian Boguang."

Dingyi had already known this, but even hearing this the second time around, she became just as angry as before. She struck the table heavily with her palm. Two bowls of wonton jumped off the table and smashed onto the ground.

The Huashan apprentices all looked very embarrassed. Lingshan was so worried that tears began to roll down her cheeks. "They must be lying, or...or maybe Uncle-Master Tian-Song saw a different person," she said in a trembling voice.

"We all know who Priest Tian-Song of Taishan Sword School is," Dingyi exclaimed loudly. "How could he be mistaken? How could he ever speak nonsense? This animal Linghu Chong, he even gets along with an evil person like Tian Boguang. He has sunk very low. Even if your Master doesn't handle this seriously and covers for his students, I won't let him go so easily. This 'Ten Thousand Miles Loner' Tian Boguang has been a plague on society. I, an old nun,

must rid the people of the scourge. When I heard the news and went there, Tian Boguang and Linghu Chong had already spirited Yilin away! I...I...looked everywhere but still couldn't find them...." Her voice became hoarse. She stamped her feet on the ground and sighed, "Oh, Yilin, my child. Yilin, my child!"

The Huashan apprentices' hearts were beating rapidly. That Big Apprentice Brother dragging a nun of the Heng-Shan Sword School off to a wine house to drink and staining the nun's reputation was already a clear violation of school rules; to make matters worse, he made friends with someone like Tian Boguang!

After a long pause, Lao Denuo was finally able to collect himself and speak again.

"Uncle-Master, maybe senior apprentice brother Linghu was at the same table of Tian Boguang only by chance; that doesn't really make them friends. Senior apprentice brother Linghu has been quite drunk these days and probably was a little hazy. What one does when drunk shouldn't really count...."

"A drunk still has thirty percent of his faculties. As a mature adult, can't he even distinguish between good and evil?" Dingyi roared.

"Yes, Uncle-Master!" Lao Denuo said hastily, not daring to argue. "I wonder where senior apprentice brother Linghu might be right now. Let us apprentices find him and reproach him; we'll have him come and kowtow to apologize to you first, Uncle-Master, and then report to my Master so he can administer a heavy punishment."

"Am I here to discipline your apprentice brother?" Dingyi snarled. Her arm shot out suddenly and grabbed Lingshan by the wrist. Lingshan felt as if an iron hoop had bound her wrist. "Ah!" She cried out and then muttered in a trembling voice, "Uncle...Uncle-Master!"

"Your Huashan Sword School kidnapped my Yilin. I am taking a female apprentice of your Huashan Sword School in

exchange. When you return my Yilin to me, I will release your Lingshan!" Dingyi growled. She turned around and dragged Lingshan after her. Lingshan felt her upper body become sore and numb, and had to stagger along with Dingyi into the street.

Lao Denuo and Liang Fa both jumped forth instantly to block Sister Dingyi's way.

"Uncle-Master," Lao Denuo bowed and said apologetically, "my Big Apprentice Brother offended you; naturally you would be angry, but that really has nothing to do with Little Apprentice Sister. Uncle-Master, please show mercy and let her go."

"Sure, I will!" Dingyi yelled scornfully. She raised her right arm and swept it out in an arc.

Lao Denuo and Liang Fa felt a strong burst of energy shooting toward them, so strong that they could hardly breathe. They then found themselves flying backwards. Lao Denuo landed on his back at the door of the shop across the street from the teashop. With a splintering crack, two of the door planks broke in half. Liang Fa flew straight toward a wonton stove. If he had landed on the wonton stove and knocked it over, boiling water would have splashed all over him and scalded him badly. But the old wonton seller reached out with his left hand and caught Liang Fa by his back, so Liang Fa landed safely.

Sister Dingyi turned back and stared at the old wonton seller. "So it's you!" she said.

"That's right, it's me," the old man smiled. "Sister, you've got quite a temper."

"That's none of your concern," Dingyi snapped.

Right at that moment, with oilcloth umbrellas over their heads and lanterns in their hands, two men rushed toward the teashop. "Are you the respectful Sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School?" they shouted from afar.

"You flatter me. I am Dingyi of the Heng-Shan Sword School. Who are you?" Dingyi asked.



When the two men came closer, the two big red words written on the lanterns in their hands also became more recognizable. It read, "Liu House."

"We junior apprentices were instructed by our Master to invite Uncle-Master Dingyi and all the fellow apprentice sisters to have dinner at our humble house," one said. "We didn't get the news that you had already arrived at Hengshan, so we didn't greet you at the gate. Please pardon us." He bowed to pay his respect.

"That is very polite of you. Are you two apprentices of Master Liu?" Dingyi asked in a slightly softer tone.

"Yes. My name is Xiang Danian, and this is my apprentice brother Mi Weiyi. How are you, Uncle-Master?" The two saluted again.

Seeing the good manners of the pair, Dingyi agreed, "All right, we were just about to go visit Master Liu, anyway."

"May I ask who you are?" Xiang Danian asked Liang Fa.

"I am Liang Fa, apprentice of the Huashan Sword School," Liang Fa answered.

"You are the senior third brother Liang of the Huashan Sword School!" Xiang Danian said happily. "I have been looking forward to meeting you. Everyone please come to our humble house. Our Master told us to greet all the heroes from different groups, but there are so many people coming, we are afraid that we have been poor hosts and offended friends. Please come this way."

"We were planning to wait here until Big Apprentice Brother shows up, and then go to congratulate Uncle-Master Liu together," Lao Denuo went over and said.

"You must be second apprentice brother Lao," Xiang Danian said. "My Master always praises Huashan apprentice brothers studying under Uncle-Master Yue. Especially apprentice brother Linghu, a very outstanding young hero. Since apprentice brother Linghu is not here yet, why don't you come first?"

Lao Denuo pondered the situation in his head. "Little Apprentice Sister is under the control of Uncle-Master Dingyi, and it seems that she won't let her go easily. We simply have no other choice but to go with her." At that thought, he answered, "I hope this will not be an inconvenience."

"Your coming to Hengshan is an honor. Why be so modest? Please! Please!" Xiang Danian greeted.

"Aren't you going to invite this one?" Dingyi pointed at the old wonton seller.

Xiang Danian looked at the old man for a moment before he recognized him. "So, it is Uncle-Master He<sup>31</sup> from Mount Yandang!" He bowed. "What a lack of manners on my part. Uncle-Master He, will you please come to our humble house as well?"

He had guessed that this old wonton seller was the master from Mount Yandang, He Sanqi. He Sanqi made a living by selling wontons when he was young. Even after he became proficient in the martial arts, he still carried his wonton stove with him when he wandered about. The wonton stove was more or less like his trademark. Although he had tremendous skills, he did not seek fame or wealth, and was content to live off his small business. Everyone in the Martial World respected him. There were thousands of people selling wonton on streets and in alleys; the only one that sold wontons and also had excellent Kung Fu skills would have to be He Sanqi.

"I'll go," He Sanqi said with a smile, and started to clear off the wonton bowls on the table.

"We junior apprentices didn't recognize you, respectful Master. I hope senior Master does not mind," Lao Denuo said apologetically.

"Not at all, not at all. You came to me as my good customers, why would I mind? Nine bowls of wonton, ten coins a piece. That means you owe me ninety coins." He Sanqi extended his left palm out after the words.

Lao Denuo was very embarrassed, and wasn't sure if He Sanqi was just kidding.

"Hey, pay the bill after you eat. He Sanqi never said he was letting you eat for free," Dingyi said.

"Yeah, small business, cash only. No credits or late payments, not even for relatives or close friends," He Sanqi announced.

"Of course, of course," Lao Denuo answered. He dared not to give any extra, so he counted ninety copper coins carefully and handed the money over respectfully with both hands.

He Sanqi took the money, and then turned to Dingyi, with his palm out. "You broke two of my bowls and two china spoons. That comes to a total of fourteen coins."

"You penny-pinching skinflint! You even cheat money from nuns. Yiguang, pay him the money," Dingyi chortled.

Yiguang counted fourteen coins and handed over the money respectfully with both hands. He Sanqi took the money, threw the coins into a bamboo tube by the wonton stove, and then lifted the stove and said, "Let's go!"

"We'll take care of all the bills later. Write them up under Master Liu," Xiang Danian said to the teashop waiter.

"Ha you all, they are all Master Liu's guests ha you all. It is an honor to have them here ha you all. Forget about the bills, ha you all. It's on the house," the waiter said, beaming.

Xiang Danian distributed the umbrellas they had brought with them and then led the way at the front. Dingyi dragged the girl Lingshan of Huashan Sword School and walked side by side with He Sanqi. All the Huashan apprentices and Heng-Shan apprentices followed behind.

Lin Pingzhi thought to himself, "Let me follow them from far behind. Let's see if I can sneak into Liu Zhengfeng's house by chance."

After the group turned a corner, he stood up and walked to the corner of the street. The group was heading north, so he followed in the heavy rain by walking under the eaves by

the street. After walking three long streets, he saw a big mansion on the left side of the street. Four big lanterns in front illuminated the gate. About ten people stood in front, some holding torches and others holding umbrellas, busily greeting guests. After Dingyi, He Sanqi, and the others walked into the house, more guests approached the house from both ends of the street.

Lin Pingzhi plucked up his courage and walked to the gate. Two groups of guests happened to be going into the mansion led by an apprentice of the Liu House. Lin Pingzhi followed them in quietly. The greeting apprentices thought he was one of the guests and greeted, "Come in please! Have some tea please."

Lin Pingzhi stepped into the crowded great hall. There were over two hundred people sitting at different tables and talking to each other. Lin Pingzhi calmed down a little. "There are so many people here; no one will ever pay any attention to me. I just need to find those Qingcheng villains, then I'll be able to find out where my mom and dad are." So he sat down at a small table in a dark corner. Soon, servants brought tea, snacks, and hot towels for him.

He looked around, and saw the nuns of Heng-Shan Sword School sitting at a table to the left. The apprentices of Huashan Sword School were sitting around another table nearby. The girl Lingshan was also sitting there. It seemed that Dingyi had decided to let her go. But Dingyi and He Sanqi were not among them.

Lin Pingzhi surveyed one table after another, and felt a sudden shock when he saw Fang Renzhi, Yu Renhao, and a bunch of others sitting around two tables. Obviously they were all apprentices of the Qingcheng Sword School. His parents weren't among them. He wondered where they could be kept. Feeling both sad and angry, and also fearful that his parents were already dead, he felt a strong urge to move to a table closer to them, so he could overhear some of their conversation. But considering that it had been so difficult for

him to get this far, if he acted recklessly and attracted the attention of Fang Renzhi and his fellows, he would not only have wasted all his efforts so far, but would also be getting himself into a fatal situation.

A disturbance suddenly started from near the gate. Several men in blue robes came in hurriedly carrying two door planks. Two men lay on the door planks. They were covered with white sheets that were soaked with blood. People in the hall soon gathered around them to have a closer look.

“They are from the Taishan Sword School!” Somebody muttered. “That’s Priest Tian-Song of the Taishan Sword School. Wow, that wound on him looks fatal. Who’s the other one?”

“He’s an apprentice of Priest Tian-Men – the Head Master of the Taishan Sword School. His name is Chi. Is he dead already?”

“Sure. Dead! Look at that knife wound – in from his chest and out his back, how could he survive that?”

Amid the uproar, the dead one and the wounded one were both carried into the Back Hall. Many people followed them there. The ones remaining in the great hall all began to talk about the incident.

“Priest Tian-Song is an excellent fighter from the Taishan Sword School. Who would be so bold as to challenge him?”

“If this person could wound Priest Tian-Song, he obviously has better Kung Fu skills. Better skills, more courage, that’s why.”

While the crowd was still discussing the incident, Xiang Danian emerged from the Back Hall and went straight to the table where all the apprentices from the Huashan Sword School were gathered.

“Apprentice brother Lao, my Master would like to have a word with you. Will you please come with me?” he asked Lao Denuo.

"Sure," Lao Denuo answered. He stood up and followed Xiang Danian into the inner room.

They went through a long hallway, and then into a side hall. There were five armchairs placed side by side at the north end of the hall. Four of them were empty, while a big red-faced Taoist priest occupied the easternmost chair. Lao Denuo knew that these five armchairs were reserved for the five Head Masters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. The Head Masters of Songshan, Heng-Shan, Huashan, and Hengshan hadn't arrived yet. This red-faced Taoist priest was none other than the Head Master of the Taishan Sword School, Priest Tian-Men. Nineteen senior masters sat by his sides. Sister Dingyi from the Heng-Shan Sword School, Yu Canghai from the Qingcheng Sword School and He Sanqi from Mount Yandang were all among them. At the south end of the hall, upon the seat for the host, sat a short, fat, middle-aged man in expensive dark red-brown robes of silk. He was the host Liu Zhengfeng.

Lao Denuo first saluted the host Liu Zhengfeng, and then knelt down in front of Priest Tian-Men with a greeting, "Apprentice of Huashan Sword School, Lao Denuo, pays his respect to Uncle-Master Tian-Men."

Priest Tian-Men appeared to be full of rage, and seemed to be on the verge of exploding. "Where is Linghu Chong?" he bellowed, striking the arm of the chair heavily with his left hand. His voice was so astounding that it sounded like thunder from the sky. Even the people in the great hall could hear him and everyone shuddered.

"Third apprentice brother, they are looking for Big Apprentice Brother again!" the young girl Lingshan cried.

Liang Fa nodded but did not say a word. After a while, he whispered, "Let's all stay calm! There are so many people gathered here from different places; don't let them look upon our Huashan Sword School with scorn."

Lin Pingzhi couldn't help thinking, "They are looking for Linghu Chong again. This old fellow Linghu certainly has a

knack for getting into trouble.”

Back at the Side Hall, Lao Denuo’s ears were almost deafened by the resounding bellow from Priest Tian-Men. He had to remain kneeling for quite a while before he could get a grip of himself and stand up again.

“Uncle-Master, apprentice brother Linghu went separately from us in the town of Hengyang,” he answered. “We had planned to meet in Hengshan and then come to the Liu House to congratulate Uncle-Master Liu. If he doesn’t make it today, he will surely come tomorrow.”

“He still dares to come? He still has the gall to come? Linghu Chong is the Big Apprentice Brother of your Huashan Sword School. Isn’t he supposed to be on the chivalrous side of the Martial World? What is he doing hanging around with that wicked rapist who stops at no evil, Tian Boguang! What does he think he is doing?” Priest Tian-Men roared angrily.

“From what I know, Big Apprentice Brother does not know Tian Boguang at all. Big Apprentice Brother is always fond of drinking; maybe he didn’t know it was Tian Boguang that he was drinking with,” Lao Denuo tried to speculate.

Stamping his foot on the floor heavily, Priest Tian-Men stood up. “You are foolish to defend that damn swine Linghu Chong,” he snarled, his voice filled with rage. “Apprentice brother Tian-Song, you...you tell him how you were wounded. Tell him whether Linghu Chong knew Tian Boguang.”

Two door planks were laid on the floor to the west. A dead body lay on one, and a long-bearded Taoist priest lay on the other. The priest’s face appeared almost as white as a sheet, and blood soaked through his entire beard. In a very low voice, he started talking.

“This morning...I...I was with nephew apprentice Chi at the Huiyan...Huiyan Wine House in...Hengyang. We saw Linghu Chong...together with Tian Boguang and a little nun....” He had to stop to catch his breath before finishing the words.

“Brother Tian-Song, you don’t have to repeat the story. I will tell him what you said earlier,” Liu Zhengfeng volunteered. Turning his head to Lao Denuo, he said, “Nephew apprentice Lao, nephew apprentice Linghu and you fellow apprentices came a long way to my ceremony. I really appreciate the good will of apprentice brother Yue and all of you nephew apprentices. But we don’t know how nephew apprentice Linghu met Tian Boguang, and so we must find out the truth. Since our Five Mountains Sword Alliance is like a big family, if nephew apprentice Linghu has truly done something wrong, it is up to us to give him some advice....”

“What advice? Purge the school by chopping off his head!” Priest Tian-Men shouted angrily.

“Apprentice brother Yue is always strict with respect to school rules, and the Huashan Sword School has always had a first-class reputation. This time nephew Linghu really went a little bit too far,” Liu Zhengfeng said with a sigh.

“You still call him a nephew? Nephew my ass!” Priest Tian-Men swore angrily. After the words came out, he realized that as a Head Master of a big sword school, it was really not appropriate for him to use such foul language in front of Sister Dingyi. But it was already too late to take it back. So he let out a loud breath and sat back down angrily.

“Uncle-Master Liu, would you be kind enough to tell me what happened?” Lao Denuo requested.

Liu Zhengfeng said, “Just now, priest brother Tian-Song told us that this morning, he went to the Huiyan Wine House in Hengyang with Chi Baicheng, the apprentice of priest brother Tian-Men, to have a couple of drinks. When they went up to the wine house on the second floor, they saw three people drinking and eating there: the wicked rapist Tian Boguang, nephew apprentice Linghu, and the little apprentice of Sister Dingyi, Yilin. Priest brother Tian-Song felt it was very strange. He didn’t know any of those three, but from their clothing, he could tell that one was an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, and one was an apprentice of



the Heng-Shan Sword School. Please hold your anger, Sister Dingyi. Nephew apprentice Yilin was coerced; it was obvious that she was not there of her own free will.

“Priest brother Tian-Song said that Tian Boguang was a man of about thirty years of age dressed in nice clothes. He didn’t know who the man was, but later he heard nephew apprentice Linghu saying, ‘Brother Tian, although you have Qing-Gong<sup>32</sup> skills unsurpassed in the entire Martial World, if you have really bad luck, no matter how good your Qing-Gong skills are, you won’t be able to escape.’ Since his surname was Tian and he had the best Qing-Gong skills in the Martial World, there was no doubt he must have been ‘Ten Thousand Miles Loner’ Tian Boguang. Priest brother Tian-Song is one who hates evil as if it was his personal enemy. When he saw the three drinking and eating together, of course he was enraged.”

“Yes!” Lao Denuo answered, thinking, “Three people drank together in the Huiyan Wine House. One was the infamous rapist, one was a little nun, and the other was the big senior apprentice of our Huashan Sword School; it was indeed quite an odd scene.”

Liu Zhengfeng continued, “He then heard Tian Boguang saying, ‘I, Tian Boguang, come and go as I please, traveling around the world alone. What’s there to worry about? Since we have already seen this little nun, why not just let her stay here and accompany us...?’”

At Liu Zhengfeng’s words, Lao Denuo cast a suspicious glance at him, and then also sneaked an equally suspicious peek from the corner of his eyes at Priest Tian-Song. Liu Zhengfeng understood instantly.

“Priest brother Tian-Song is wounded very badly,” he said. “Of course he was unable to tell everything so clearly and continuously. I added some of my own words, but the main idea is just the same. Priest brother Tian-Song, is that right?”

“Yes...yes, correct...correct!” Tian-Song managed to answer.

With that confirmation, Liu Zhengfeng went on, “Nephew apprentice Chi Baicheng couldn’t stand it any more, so he struck the table with his hand and shouted, ‘Are you the evil rapist Tian Boguang? Everyone in the Martial World wants to kill you to rid the world of a scourge like you, yet here you are, bragging about yourself shamelessly. You must be tired of living!’ He drew his weapon and jumped forward to fight. Unfortunately, he was slain by Tian Boguang. It was really a pity that an outstanding young man lost his life to such an evil rapist. Priest brother Tian-Song then jumped forth to fight with Tian Boguang. They fought for several hundreds rounds. Priest brother Tian-Song wasn’t cautious enough and in the end was wounded in the chest thanks to Tian Boguang’s dirty tricks. Afterwards, nephew apprentice Linghu still sat with the evil rapist and the two drank together. That is really contrary to the creed of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. That’s why priest brother Tian-Men is so angry.”

“What happened to our ideals of unity?” Priest Tian-Men snarled. “We martial people should be able to tell right from wrong. Associating with such an evil rapist...such an evil rapist...!” His face turned scarlet with anger, and it almost seemed that his beard bristled.

Suddenly someone called from outside of the door, “Master, I have something to report.”

Priest Tian-Men recognized it as the voice of one of his apprentices. “Come in!” he said. “What’s the matter?”

A young man about thirty years of age walked in. He first saluted to the host, Liu Zhengfeng, and all other senior masters, then he turned to Priest Tian-Men and reported.

“Master, Uncle-Master Tianbai sent us the message that he has led the search for Tian Boguang and Linghu Chong the two evil rapists, with apprentices of our school, but hasn’t found any trace of them....”

Hearing Big Apprentice Brother being classified in the “evil rapist” group, Lao Denuo felt quite embarrassed. But it seemed Big Apprentice Brother was really consorting with Tian Boguang, so what could he say?

“But outside the town of Hengyang, we found a corpse with a sword in his abdomen. The sword belonged to the evil rapist Linghu Chong...,” the Taishan Sword School apprentice continued.

“Who was the deceased?” Priest Tian-Men asked hurriedly.

The young man gave a quick glance at Yu Canghai before answering, “He was an apprentice brother of Uncle-Master Yu. At the time when we found the body, nobody knew who he was. After we took the body back to town, someone recognized him to be apprentice brother Luo Renjie...”

Yu Canghai uttered a cry of shock and stood up instantly. “It was Renjie? Where’s the body?”

“Here it is,” someone answered from outside.

Yu Canghai was a man with good self-control. Although the unexpected bad news hit him hard, and the deceased was one of the four best apprentices of Qingcheng “Ying Xiong Hao Jie,” he maintained his composure. “Nephew apprentice, please carry the body in,” he said.

“Yes,” the apprentice outside the door responded.

Two men carried in a door plank. One of the two was an apprentice of the Hengshan Sword School, and the other was an apprentice of the Qingcheng Sword School. On the plank was a body with a sword thrust into his abdomen and going up at an angle. The sword was about three feet long, but the part protruding from the body was less than one foot long. Apparently, the tip of the sword went all the way up into the corpse’s throat. It was very rare to see this type of ruthless move that began from the bottom and moved upwards in the Martial World.

“Linghu Chong, humph, Linghu Chong, how...how vicious you are,” Yu Canghai murmured.

“Uncle-Master sent the message that he is still searching for the two evil rapists. It would be better if one or two of the Uncle-Masters here could go and give him a helping hand,” the Taishan apprentice continued.

“I’ll go!” Dingyi and Yu Canghai said almost in unison.

Right at that moment, a sweet and lovely voice came from outside of the door, “Master, I am back!”

Dingyi’s expression changed immediately. “Is that Yilin? Get in here right now!” she shouted.

Everybody looked at the doorway, wanting to take a good look at this little nun who was bold enough to drink in public with two evil rapists. The door curtain was lifted, and when the little nun walked quietly into the hall, everyone felt as if the whole room had suddenly been brightened up. She possessed grace and beauty. No one would have argued that she was a perfect creation of Heaven. She was only about sixteen years of age, and although she was wrapped in a big and loose nun’s robe, the curves of her body were apparent from her graceful movements. She walked till she stood in front of Dingyi, then knelt down and called out, “Master...!” After saying this, she suddenly burst into tears.

Dingyi straightened her face. “You...what happened? How were you able to get away?” she asked anxiously.

“Master, I...I thought I would never see you again,” Yilin said in tears. Her voice was sweet and charming, and the two little hands clutching Dingyi’s sleeves were so white they almost looked like they were carved from jade.

“How could such a beauty become a nun?” many in the room couldn’t help thinking to themselves.

Yu Canghai gave her only a quick glance, and then went back to staring at the sword in Luo Renjie’s body. There were green tassels attached to the handle of the sword. Near the handle, the words “Huashan Linghu Chong” were etched on the blade. He looked around and saw Lao Denuo carrying on his waist the same kind of sword with green tassels attached to the handle. All of a sudden, he jumped toward Lao Denuo

and thrust his fingers toward Lao Denuo's eyes. The attack was as swift as it was fierce, and in an instant, the tips of his fingers had touched Lao Denuo's eyelid. Lao Denuo was startled and hurriedly raised his arms to block the attack using a move called "Raise Fire to Burn Sky." With a sneer, Yu Canghai rounded his left hand in a very small circle, and grabbed Lao Denuo's hands in his left palm. Extending his right arm, he quickly unsheathed the sword by Lao Denuo's waist.

Lao Denuo pulled hard in an effort to free his hands, which were being held by Yu Canghai, but failed miserably. A split of a second later, he found the tip of his own sword pointing right at his chest. "I...I am not involved!" he shouted out frantically.

Yu Canghai looked at the blade of the sword. There were words saying "Huashan Lao Denuo." The size and the style of the words matched the other sword exactly. Lowering his wrist, he pointed the sword toward Lao Denuo's stomach, and spoke grimly.

"Which move in your respectful Huashan Sword Art is this one that thrusts from the bottom up at an angle?"

Lao Denuo could feel cold sweat dripping from his forehead. "Our...our Huashan Sword Art does not have...have such a move," he muttered in a quavering voice.

Yu Canghai thought, "The move that killed Renjie was thrust up from the lower abdomen, and the tip of the sword went all the way to the throat. Did Linghu Chong bend over and thrust upward from his backside? But after this killing, why didn't he take his sword but intentionally left this evidence? Is he challenging the Qingcheng Sword School?" but suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by Yilin's voice.

"Uncle-Master Yu, this move of Big Brother Linghu's is not part of the Huashan Sword Art."

Yu Canghai turned around, his face an icy mask. "Sister, listen to the words of your respectful apprentice. What did she call this villain?"

"I have ears of my own and don't need you to point things out to me!" Dingyi replied angrily.

She had heard Yilin referring to Linghu Chong as "Big Brother Linghu," and was already angry about it. If Yu Canghai had spoken one moment later, she would have delivered a stern rebuke to Yilin, but since Yu Canghai spoke first, especially in such an impolite manner, she instead defended her apprentice.

"The words just slipped out of her mouth. What's the big deal? Our Five Mountains sword schools are joined into one alliance; apprentices from any sword school of the Five Mountains are naturally fellow apprentices. What's so strange about that?"

"Well! Well!" Yu Canghai laughed mockingly, as he gathered his inner strength from his lower abdomen, and then projected the energy from his left palm to push Lao Denuo away. Lao Denuo flew backwards and his back struck a wall. Dirt and debris dropped from the ceiling on impact.

"You think you are so innocent? Why have you been tailing me all this way? What are you up to?" Yu Canghai snapped.

After the shove and the impact, Lao Denuo felt as if his organs were turned upside down. He leaned against the wall and tried his best to not collapse. His knees were so weak that the only thing he wanted to do was to sit down on the floor. After hearing Yu Canghai's words, he groaned inwardly. "So this crafty little crook was already aware that Little Apprentice Sister and I were spying on them."

"Yilin, come with me. Tell me exactly how they seized you," Dingyi said as she pulled Yilin by the hand and walked toward the door.

Everyone knew only too well if such a beautiful little nun fell into the hands of an evil rapist like Tian Boguang, it would be nearly impossible for her to maintain her virginity. The complete story, of course, would not be appropriate to be revealed in front of other people. Obviously Sister Dingyi was

going to take her somewhere private and then ask about the details.

Swiftly, Yu Canghai rushed to the doorway and blocked their exit. "This incident involves two lives. Little Sister Yilin, please stay right here to tell the story," he demanded. He paused a second and then continued, "Nephew apprentice Chi Baicheng was a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. In your alliance, all are fellow apprentices; maybe the Taishan Sword School does not really mind that Linghu Chong killed Chi, but my apprentice Luo Renjie did not have the honor of calling Linghu Chong an apprentice brother."

Dingyi was a very forceful woman; normally even her big senior sister Dingjing or the Head Master of Heng-Shan Sword School, senior sister Dingxian, would give way to her. How could she let Yu Canghai block her way with such impunity? Upon hearing these words, she raised her eyebrows immediately.

Liu Zhengfeng had long known of Sister Dingyi's hot-temper. When he saw Dingyi raise her eyebrows, he knew she was ready to strike. Yu Canghai and Dingyi were both first-class masters in the Martial World. If they started a fight, things would really get out of hand. So he rushed forward and bowed deeply.

"Both of you have given me great honor by being my respectful guests here at my ceremony. For the sake of that, please do not damage the spirit of that goodwill. It is my entire fault that I did not serve my guests well, I beg your pardon." He kept bowing to both Dingyi and Yu Canghai.

Sister Dingyi let out a dry smile. "Master Liu, you really have a good sense of humor. I am only angry at this bull-nose.<sup>33</sup> It has nothing to do with you. Because he doesn't allow me to leave, I leave to spite him. If he doesn't block my way, then it is possible for me to stay."

Yu Canghai had some degree of respect for Sister Dingyi's fighting skills, and didn't have total confidence in his ability to beat her in a fight. In addition, although her

senior apprentice sister Dingxian had an amiable nature, it was well known that her Kung Fu skills were much greater. Even if he could win the fight today, her senior apprentice sister surely wouldn't let it go that easily. And once he offended the Heng-Shan Sword School, there would be no end of trouble. So he also forced a dry smile.

"All I want is for Little Sister Yilin to tell us the truth about what happened. Yu Canghai dare not block the Heng-Shan White-Cloud Nunnery Master's way." After saying these words, he moved back to his seat.

"It's good you know that," Sister Dingyi said. She held Yilin's hand and walked back to her seat as well.

"What on earth happened after the day we lost you?" she asked Yilin. Afraid that since Yilin was young and inexperienced, she might say something that would disgrace both herself and the Heng-Shan Sword School, she hurriedly added, "Just tell the necessary parts. If it is irrelevant, we don't need to know."

"Yes, Master!" Yilin answered. "I haven't done anything against the instructions from the senior masters. But Tian Boguang, the villain, he...he...he...!"

"I got it!" Dingyi nodded. "You don't have to say another word now. I know everything. I will definitely slay the two villains, Tian Boguang and Linghu Chong, to assuage your anger...!"

Yilin looked at Dingyi in surprise with her crystal clear eyes. "Big Brother Linghu?" she uttered. "He...he...." Tears began to fall from her beautiful eyes. In a choking voice, she said, "He...he is already dead!"

Everyone in the room was stunned by the news.

Priest Tian-Men's anger immediately vanished. "How did he die? Who killed him?" he asked in a loud voice.

"It was this...this Qingcheng...Qingcheng villain." Yilin pointed at the body of Luo Renjie.

Yu Canghai could not help feeling proud. "So the scoundrel Linghu Chong was killed by Renjie and they ended



in mutual annihilation!" he thought. "Good. Renjie my boy, I knew he had guts! He didn't disgrace the fame of my Qingcheng Sword School."

"So all members of your Five Mountains Sword Alliance are the good guys, and all people of my Qingcheng Sword School are bad guys?" he glared at Yilin and sneered.

Tears kept falling from her eyes, Yilin said, "I...I don't know about that. I am not talking about you, Uncle-Master Yu. I am only talking about him." She pointed at Luo Renjie's body again.

"What are you scaring the child for?" Dingyi barked at Yu Canghai. "Yilin, don't be afraid. Tell us why he was a bad guy? Your Master is here, nobody will dare give you any trouble." She gave a glare back at Yu Canghai.

"Buddhists do not lie. Little Sister, are you willing to give a vow in the name of Buddha?" Yu Canghai demanded. He was afraid that Yilin would speak at Dingyi's instigation and describe Luo Renjie's behavior as intolerable. Since this apprentice of his had already perished along with Linghu Chong, there could be no other testimony; everybody would only have the statements from a single party.

"I dare not ever lie to my Master," Yilin said. She knelt down facing the outside, put her palms together, lowered her head and intoned, "Apprentice Yilin is reporting to her Master and the other Uncle-Masters. She dares not speak untruth. The Buddha has great powers and will verify her words."

Everyone could sense the sincerity in her words, so all became well disposed toward her. A scholarly, black-bearded, middle-aged man had been listening by the side quietly from the beginning. He interrupted Yilin and said, "The little Sister had already vowed. Of course we will believe her words."

"Did you hear that, bull-nose? Even Mr. Wen agrees. She will speak the truth," Dingyi said. She knew the man's surname was Wen, and everybody called him Mr. Wen, but she had no idea what his first name was. She only knew that he was from southern Shanxi Province and was famous for his

Kung Fu with a pair of Judge's Pens. He was a master of acupoints.

Everyone's eyes turned to Yilin. Her glorious face brightened the entire room like a brilliant pearl or a piece of beautiful jade, with its purity and flawlessness. Even Yu Canghai thought to himself, "This little nun probably won't tell a lie." Silence befell the room while all waited for Yilin to start.

"Yesterday afternoon," Yilin began, "I was following Master and my apprentice sisters, heading to the town of Hengyang. In the middle of the trip, it started to rain. As we went down the valley, I slipped. Although I managed to hang on to some rocks to break my fall, my hands were covered with mud and moss. So after we descended into the valley, I went to a stream to wash my hands. Suddenly, beside my shadow in the stream, appeared the shadow of a man. I was so startled that I stood up immediately. Then I felt a pain in my back – he had already sealed my acupoints. I was very scared and wanted to call my Master to come and help me, but it was already too late; because of the sealed acupoints, I could not utter a sound. The man picked me up and after walking about ten or twenty yards, put me inside a cave. I was scared to death, yet I couldn't move an inch or make a sound. After quite a while, I heard the three senior apprentice sisters calling me in three different places, 'Yilin, Yilin, where are you?' That man just grinned and whispered to me, 'If they come here, I'll catch every one of them!' The three apprentice sisters looked for me everywhere and then went off in different directions.

"After quite a while, hearing that my three apprentice sisters had gone far away, he released my acupoints. I immediately ran toward the opening of the cave, but this man moved a lot faster than I could, and had already blocked the way. So, I ended up running into his chest. That man burst into laughter. 'You think you can run away?' he said. I hurriedly jumped backwards, pulled out my long sword, and

was ready to plunge it into him. But then I thought that since this man did not hurt me at all, and we Buddhists should always be merciful to others, there was no reason for me to hurt him. Killing is the first prohibition for Buddhists, so I didn't thrust the sword.

"‘Why are you blocking my way?’ I asked. ‘If you don't move aside, I'll have to thrust and...cut you.’"

"The man just grinned. He said, ‘Little Sister, you really have a kind heart. You just can't bear to kill me, can you?’"

"‘I don't have any score to settle with you, why should I kill you?’ I said.

"‘That's great! Why don't we sit down and have a chat,’ he suggested.

"‘My Master and my apprentice sisters are looking for me. And anyway, my Master does not allow me to just speak with any man,’ I exclaimed.

"‘But you already have,’ he said, ‘so what's the difference a couple of times more or less?’"

"‘Move aside, don't you know that my Master is very tough? If she had seen you behaving like this, she probably would have broken both your legs,’ I said.

"The man replied, ‘If you want to break my legs, go ahead. But your Master...she's too old, I couldn't stomach it....’"

"Nonsense! You even remembered all this rubbish?" Dingyi yelled.

Many people could not help laughing inwardly. But for the sake of Sister Dingyi, nobody dared let out a smile. All tried their best to keep looking serious.

"But he did say that," Yilin insisted earnestly.

"Okay, okay, these types of words are not really related to the story that you are telling, so don't mention them anymore. Just talk about how you met Linghu Chong of the Huashan Sword School," Dingyi instructed.

"Yes, Master. The man kept talking, and just wouldn't let me out, and said that I...I was very pretty, and wanted me to

sleep....”

“Stop!” Dingyi yelled. “You kids don’t think before you speak. How can you talk about such things?”

“It was he who said that, I did not agree, and I did not sleep...,” Yilin tried to explain.

“Shut up!” Dingyi yelled even more loudly.

The Qingcheng apprentice who had carried the body of Luo Renjie in could not control himself anymore and let out a laugh. Dingyi was infuriated. She picked up a teacup from the table with a flourish, and flung the contents of the cup at him. She used the unique inner strength of the Heng-Shan Sword School when she flung the tea; it shot through the air quickly and accurately. The apprentice couldn’t move aside in time, and the hot liquid splashed squarely on his face. He cried out loud from the burning pain.

“Your apprentice can talk about it, but my apprentice can’t laugh at it? How unreasonable!” Yu Canghai complained angrily.

Sister Dingyi looked at Yu Canghai from the corner of her eyes. “Heng-Shan Dingyi has been unreasonable for many decades. Haven’t you heard?” She held the empty teacup and was ready to throw it at Yu Canghai.

Yu Canghai didn’t look at her, and even turned his body away from her.

Seeing Yu Canghai show so much confidence in himself, and knowing the good Kung Fu skills of the Qingcheng Master, Dingyi did not want to start any trouble. So she put the teacup down slowly and said to Yilin, “Go on with the story! Don’t be so wordy with things that have nothing to do with the important facts.”

“Yes, Master,” said Yilin. “I tried to get out of the cave, but that man kept blocking my way and wouldn’t let me pass. Seeing the sky becoming darker and darker, I was very worried and finally thrust my sword toward him. Master, I dare not violate the killing prohibition; I did not really want to kill him. I just wanted to scare him away. I used the move

called 'Golden Pins Solve the Troubles,' but he extended his left arm and grabbed at my...my body. I was astounded, so I dodged to the side, and he snatched the sword right out of my hand. That man's Kung Fu skills were remarkable. He held the hilt of the sword with his right hand, and the tip of the sword using his thumb and index finger of his left hand. Then he just gently bent it, and with a crisp crack, the tip of the sword broke off about an inch."

"He broke off about an inch of the sword tip?" Dingyi repeated.

"Yes!" Yilin affirmed.

Dingyi and Priest Tian-Men looked at each other, both thinking the same thing: If Tian Boguang had only broken off the sword from the middle, it would be nothing special, but he broke an inch off the tip of the steel sword with just two fingers; the strength in his fingers must have been tremendous.

Priest Tian-Men drew a sword from an apprentice's waist, and also held the tip of the sword with the thumb and index finger of his left hand. He bent it slightly, and with a cracking sound, he broke about an inch off the tip. "Like this?" he asked.

"Yes," Yilin answered. "So Uncle-Master knows how to do it too!"

Priest Tian-Men gave a snort and shoved the broken sword back in the apprentice's sheath. He struck the table with his left hand; the inch of broken sword tip sunk into the table like an inlay.

"Uncle-Master, you really have marvelous skills. I guess the villain Tian Boguang probably doesn't know how to do that," Yilin said cheerfully. But then, her face turned pale and she lowered her head. With a gentle sigh, she said, "Alas, but Uncle-Master, you weren't there at the time, otherwise, Big Brother Linghu wouldn't have been wounded so badly."

"What do you mean wounded badly? Didn't you say that he was already dead?" Priest Tian-Men asked.

“That’s right, if Big Brother Linghu wasn’t wounded so badly, he wouldn’t have been murdered by the Qingcheng villain Luo Renjie,” Yilin said remorsefully.

Hearing her associating the word “villain” with Tian Boguang while also calling his apprentice a “villain”, which put the apprentice of Qingcheng on the same level as the notorious rapist, Yu Canghai could not help letting out another grunt.

Seeing tears welling up in Yilin’s pretty eyes, and that she was on the verge of tears, no one wanted to ask her further regarding Linghu Chong’s fate. Priest Tian-Men, Liu Zhengfeng, Mr. Wen, and He Sanqi all couldn’t help but feel sympathy for her, and would have patted her on her back or head to comfort her if she weren’t a nun.

Yilin wiped her tears with her sleeves and continued with the story in a sobbing voice, “The villain Tian Boguang was pushing me around and began to tear at my clothes. I tried to hit him with my hands, but he caught both of them.

“Right at that moment, somebody suddenly began to laugh loudly. ‘Ha, ha, ha,’ he laughed three times, and then after a short pause, another three times.

“‘Who is that?’ Tian Boguang asked in a stern voice.

“The man outside just kept laughing.

“‘You’d better get lost fast,’ Tian Boguang warned him. ‘Making Mister Tian angry might cost you your life!’

“The man answered with another three laughs. Tian Boguang tried to ignore him and continued to tear off my clothes while the man outside just laughed again and again. Every time the man laughed, Tian Boguang got a bit angrier. I really hoped that the man would come to rescue me, but he knew how tough Tian Boguang was and dared not come into the cave, and just kept on laughing outside.

“Tian Boguang began to pour out streams of abuse. He sealed my acupoints again and rushed out of the cave, but the man had already hidden himself. After a while, Tian Boguang still could not find him, so he came back into the

cave again. As soon as he was about to reach me, the man outside the cave began laughing again. I thought it was quite interesting and could not help laughing myself.”

Sister Dingyi gave her a hard stare and remonstrated, “You were at the moment between life and death, and you still found the time to laugh?”

Yilin’s face turned a little bit red. “True. I knew I shouldn’t have laughed, but at that moment, I don’t know why, I just did. Tian Boguang lowered his body and crept back to the opening of the cave, ready to rush out if the man outside gave out another laugh. But the man was quite alert, and didn’t make a sound. Tian Boguang walked slowly toward the opening step by step. I figured it would be really bad if the man were to get caught, so when I saw that Tian Boguang was about to rush out, I shouted, ‘Look out, he is coming out!’

“The man laughed three times from a distance and said, ‘Thanks a lot, but he won’t be able to keep up with me. His Qing-Gong skills are not too good.’”

Everyone couldn’t help thinking, “Tian Boguang’s nickname is ‘Ten Thousand Miles Loner.’ He enjoys great fame in the Martial World with his outstanding Qing-Gong skills. Now someone comes along and says ‘his Qing-Gong skills are not too good,’ he must have intentionally said it to irritate Tian Boguang.”

Yilin continued, “The villain Tian Boguang suddenly turned around and gave my face a hard pinch. I screamed in pain. Then he ran out of the cave and shouted, ‘Damn punk, let’s see whose Qing-Gong is better.’ But he was tricked. The man had been hiding by the opening of the cave, and as soon as Tian Boguang rushed out, he sneaked in.

“‘Don’t worry. I am here to save you. Which of your acupoints were sealed?’ he whispered to me.

“‘My right shoulder and my back,’ I said. “It seems to be the Jian-Zhen Acupoint and Da-Zhui Acupoint! Who are you?’

“‘Let me open up your sealed acupoints first,’ he said, then started massaging at my Jian-Zhen and Da-Zhui

Acupoints.

"Perhaps I didn't tell him the right acupoints; although he tried very hard, he still couldn't release my acupoints. We heard Tian Boguang's shouting coming back toward us, so I said, 'You'd better run away quickly. If he sees you when he comes back, he will kill you.'

"He replied, 'Five Mountains Sword Alliance; the same root, different branches. When an apprentice sister is in trouble, how can I not try to help?'"

"Does he belong to the Five Mountains Sword Alliance?" Dingyi asked.

"Master, he is Linghu Chong, Big Brother Linghu."

Dingyi, Priest Tian-Men, Yu Canghai, He Sanqi, Mr. Wen, and Liu Zhengfeng all said "oh" and nodded. Lao Denuo let out a long breath. Some people had already thought that this man might be Linghu Chong, but no one was very sure until Yilin confirmed it.

Yilin went on with the story, "Hearing Tian Boguang's shouting getting closer and closer, Big Brother Linghu said, 'Pardon me!' Then he carried me out of the cave and hid inside the high grass. Right after we hid ourselves, Tian Boguang ran into the cave. He could not find me and became really angry, so he began swearing and saying lots of bad words. I didn't quite understand what he was saying. He picked up my broken sword and started slashing wildly at the high grass. Luckily it was raining that night, and there was no light from either the moon or the stars, so he could not see us. But he figured that we could not have gone far, and must have been somewhere nearby, so he kept chopping and slashing. Once the sword was so close to me that it went only a few inches above my head.

"He chopped and swore, and walked around randomly. I suddenly felt some warm drops of liquid fall on my face, and at the same time, I smelled blood. I was quite startled and asked in whisper, 'Are you wounded?' Big Brother Linghu covered my mouth with his hand. After a long while, when we



heard the sound of chopping grass going further and further away, he whispered back, 'No problem,' and then took his hand away from my mouth. But the warm blood just kept dripping onto my face.

"'You are badly wounded; we've got to stop the bleeding,' I said. 'I have Heavenly Connecting Glue.'

"'Don't speak,' he ordered. 'He'll find out where we are if we move!' and then he covered his wound with his hand.

"After a while, Tian Boguang ran back. 'Ha-ha, so here you are. I can see you. Stand up!' he shouted.

"Hearing his words, I could only groan inwardly. I was ready to stand up, but I simply could not move my legs...."

"You were tricked. Tian Boguang was trying to fool you. He didn't see you at all," Sister Dingyi cried.

"That's right. Master, how did you know? You weren't there at that time!" Yilin asked in surprise.

"Was that so hard to guess?" Dingyi explained. "If he had really seen you, he would have come over and killed Linghu Chong with a single chop. Why bother shouting out loud? So the lad Linghu Chong was naive too."

Yilin shook her head. "No, Big Brother Linghu thought of that as well. He immediately covered my mouth with his hand, afraid that I would scream. Tian Boguang shouted for a while and did not hear any response, so he went about slashing some more grass. Big Brother Linghu waited until Tian Boguang went far away, then he whispered to me, 'Apprentice sister, if we can last another half an hour, when the blood and energy flows better around your sealed acupoints, I will be able to open them up. But since Tian Boguang will definitely turn back, we might not be so lucky again. I'd say let's just take our chances and hide inside the cave.'"

At these words, Mr. Wen, He Sanqi, and Liu Zhengfeng all clapped their hands. "Excellent! Brave, yet smart!" Mr. Wen praised.

Yilin went on, "I was scared to go back to the cave, but I already had great confidence in and admiration for Big Brother Linghu. If he said so, then it must be a good idea. So I said, 'Okay.' He picked me up again and rushed into the cave.

"After he put me down on the ground, I said, 'I have Heavenly Connecting Glue in my pocket. It is a miraculous medicine for sealing wounds. Please...please take it out and use it on your wounds.'

"'It's not a good time to take it out,' he objected. 'I'll wait till you can move your hands and legs again, then you can give it to me.' He drew his sword and cut off a section of his sleeve to wrap the wound on his left shoulder.

"I finally understood that when we were hiding in the grass, in order to protect me, when Tian Boguang cut his shoulder, he didn't move at all and didn't let out any sound, and in the darkness, Tian Boguang didn't notice it. I felt so sorry for him and didn't know why it was not a good time to take the medicine out...."

"So as you have said, Linghu Chong is actually a gentleman?" Dingyi let out a snort.

Yilin looked at her Master, her bright eyes filled with surprise. "Of course, Big Brother Linghu is a first-class gentleman. I didn't even know him, and he stood up and rescued me, risking his own life," she said.

Yu Canghai said coldly, "You did not know him, but he probably had seen you before. Otherwise, how could he have such a 'kind' heart?" He was implying that Linghu Chong acted bravely because of her extreme beauty.

"No! He said he had never met me before. Big Brother Linghu never lies to me; he never does!" Yilin rebutted. These words were spoken with such assurance, that although her voice was still gentle, the meaning was very resolute and decisive. All the people in the hall were moved by her pure confidence and all truly believed her.

Yu Canghai thought, "That rascal Linghu Chong was always reckless in a crazy way; if he didn't act so fearlessly for beauty, then it must have been for fame. He wanted to gain fame by fighting Tian Boguang."

Yilin continued, "After wrapping his wound, Big Brother Linghu continued massaging the acupoints on my shoulder and back. Soon we heard the chopping and slashing noises coming closer and closer. Tian Boguang had slashed his way to the opening of the cave. My heart was thumping very hard.

"Tian Boguang came into the cave and sat down on the ground silently. I held my breath and didn't even dare to breathe. Suddenly, a great pain came from my shoulder. It came so unexpected that I couldn't help groaning. That spoiled the whole thing. Tian Boguang laughed loudly and walked toward me with big steps. Big Brother Linghu just squatted by the side and did not move.

"'Little lamb, so you are still hiding in the cave, huh!'" Tian Boguang said with a smile. He stuck his hand out to grab me.

"I heard the sound of a sword thrust, and then I found that Big Brother Linghu had stabbed Tian Boguang. Tian Boguang was startled and dropped the broken sword. But the thrust didn't hit his vital parts. What a pity! Tian Boguang jumped back in a hurry, pulled out the knife by his waist, and began to swing it at Big Brother Linghu. The knife and the sword hit each other with a clang; the two started fighting. In the dark, neither of them could see. After a couple of clangs, both of them jumped backward. All I could hear was the sound of their breathing. I was scared to death."

"How many rounds did Linghu Chong fight him?" Priest Tian-Men interrupted.

"I was scared senseless at the time, and didn't notice how long they had fought," Yilin answered. "I heard Tian Boguang laughing and saying, 'Ha, you are from the Huashan

Sword School! The Huashan Sword Art is no match for my skills. What's your name?'

"Big Brother Linghu said, 'Five Mountains Sword Alliance; same root different branches. Either Huashan Sword School or Heng-Shan Sword School, we are all after you, evil rapist....' Before he could finish his words, Tian Boguang had already started his attack. It turned out that he tricked Big Brother Linghu into talking in order to find out where he was. After several more rounds, Big Brother Linghu let out a cry of pain. He was wounded again.

"Tian Boguang laughed. 'I told you. Huashan Sword Art is no match for my skills. Even if your old Master Yue had come himself, he'd lose too.' But Big Brother Linghu did not answer him again.

"Earlier, when I had a great pain on my shoulder, it turned out it was because the acupoints on my shoulder opened up by themselves. I felt some more pain on my back; those acupoints were opening up too. I slowly struggled up while moving my hands around looking for the broken sword. Big Brother Linghu heard the sound and said happily, 'Your acupoints are open now! Run away! Hurry up!'

"'Apprentice brother of the Huashan Sword School, let's fight the villain together!' I declared.

"'You run away! Hurry up! We will still be no match for him even if we fight together,' he demanded.

"Tian Boguang laughed. 'Glad you know that! Why waste your life for no reason? Hey, I really like your courage. What's your name?'

"'If you had asked for my respectful name nicely, I would tell you, but since you asked your old man so rudely, he won't pay any heed to you,' Big Brother Linghu answered.

"Master, don't you think that was funny? Big Brother Linghu wasn't his father, but called himself his 'old man'."

"That was just a rude word; it doesn't really mean 'his old man'!" Dingyi let out a disgruntled snort as she explained.

“Ah, I see. Big Brother Linghu then said, ‘Apprentice sister, you can run to the town of Hengshan. We have lots of friends there; I am sure this villain wouldn’t dare to go there looking for you.’

“‘What if he kills you?’ I asked.

“‘He is not good enough to kill me!’ Big Brother Linghu yelled. ‘I will tie him up here. Why are you still here? Run! Ouch!’ With two metallic sounds made by their weapons hitting each other, Big Brother Linghu was wounded once more.

“He got mad and started yelling at me, ‘If you don’t leave right now, I am going to start cursing you!’

“By then I had already found the broken sword on the ground, so I shouted, ‘Let’s fight him two to one.’

“‘Nothing could be better! Tian Boguang, one man and one knife, here to fight both the Huashan Sword School and the Heng-Shan Sword School,’ Tian Boguang laughed loudly.

“Big Brother Linghu started to scold me. He yelled, ‘You foolish little nun, you are an idiot. Go away! If you don’t go away, next time I see you, I’ll slap you!’

“Tian Boguang laughed. ‘This little nun doesn’t want to part with me. She won’t go.’

“Big Brother Linghu got really mad. He shouted, ‘Are you leaving or not?’

“I said, ‘No way!’

“Big Brother Linghu then said, ‘If you don’t leave now, I am going to call your Master names! Dingxian you idiotic old nun, look how you’ve taught such an idiotic little nun!’

“‘Uncle-Master Dingxian is not my Master,’ I explained.

“‘Fine, then I’ll call Sister Dingjing names!’ he said.

“‘Uncle-Master Dingjing is not my Master, either,’ I said.

“‘Bah! You’re still not leaving! I’ll call Dingyi an old idiot...!’”

Dingyi made a sour face and looked very displeased.

“Master, please don’t be angry,” Yilin said hurriedly. “Big Brother Linghu meant well for me. He didn’t really want to

call you anything.

"I said, 'I am foolish by myself. It wasn't taught by my Master!'

"Suddenly, Tian Boguang jumped forth at me and poked his finger at me. I waved my sword wildly in the darkness and forced him back.

"Big Brother Linghu shouted, 'I have a whole bunch of dirty words that I am going to use on your Master now. Aren't you afraid?'

"Don't call anyone any more names. Let's run away together!' I said.

"Your standing beside me is already blocking my moves,' Big Brother Linghu shouted. 'I can't use my best Huashan sword moves. Once you get out, then I can kill this villain with ease.'

"Tian Boguang laughed hard and said, 'You've really got some affection for this little nun, too bad that she doesn't even know your name.'

"I thought these words from the villain were quite right, so I asked, 'Apprentice brother of the Huashan Sword School, what's your name? I will tell my Master when I go to Hengshan that you saved my life.'

"Big Brother Linghu said, 'Go away! Hurry up! You are too wordy! My name is Lao, Lao Denuo!'"

Hearing his own name mentioned, Lao Denuo was stunned. "Why did Big Apprentice Brother assume my identity?" he thought to himself, feeling utterly confused.

"This Linghu Chong does kind things and walks away from the fame. That is the true characteristic of us chivalrous people," Mr. Wen nodded and murmured to himself.

Sister Dingyi glanced at Lao Denuo and murmured, "This Linghu Chong was so rude, and even dared call me names. He was probably afraid that I would go after him because of that, so he wanted to pin the blame on somebody else."

"Hey, so you're the one who called me an old idiot?" she glared at Lao Denuo.

Lao Denuo bowed hurriedly. "No, no! I dare not!"

"Sister Dingyi," Liu Zhengfeng cut in with a smile, "Linghu Chong had his reasons for using his apprentice brother Lao Denuo's name. This nephew apprentice Lao joined Huashan Sword School with previously learned skills. Although his seniority is low, his age is not. With a great bush of a beard, he could pass off as Yilin's grandfather."

Dingyi immediately understood that Linghu Chong only wanted to protect Yilin's reputation. At that time, it was totally dark in the cave; no one could recognize anyone else, even when face- to-face. If Yilin got away and mentioned that it was Lao Denuo of Huashan Sword School who saved her, no one would think up snide comments to defame her with such an old man. This not only protected Yilin's reputation, but also protected the reputation of the Heng-Shan Sword School. At this thought, she could not help letting a little smile creep into her face.

"This lad really is thoughtful." She nodded. "Yilin, what happened after that?"

Yilin answered, "By then I still didn't want to leave. I said, 'Big brother Lao, you got yourself into danger all because of me, how can I leave you in danger? If my Master learned that I was such a coward and didn't care about fellow apprentices, she would kill me herself. Master always taught us that although we are all females in the Heng-Shan Sword School, with regard to chivalry, we are never bettered by any man!'"

"Excellent, excellent! You said it right!" Dingyi applauded and shouted out. "For us Kung Fu practitioners, whoever does not exercise chivalry is better dead than alive. No matter whether man or woman, it's all the same."

Seeing the solemn expression on her face when she said these words, everyone could see that the spirit of the old nun was really no less than that of any man.

Yilin continued, "But then Big Brother Linghu began to scold me profusely. 'You darn idiotic little nun,' he said, 'all you do is talk and talk and talk, and stop me from being able

to use my unbeatable Huashan Sword Art. My old life is destined to be lost in Tian Boguang's hands. So you're in league with Tian Boguang and purposely set me up. I, Lao Denuo, am so unlucky today, seeing a nun right after I start my trip. And it is a rotten little nun that will have no son, no grandson, no nothing. Even with the super strong and super powerful magical sword arts I know, I am unable to use them, because I fear that the energy of my sword strikes would hurt the little nun's life. Alright! Very well! Tian Boguang, just give me a good chop and let's finish it off. This old man is just fated to go today!'"

All of Linghu Chong's dirty words told in Yilin's sweet and gentle voice brought inadvertent smiles of amusement to the lips of the listeners.

Then Yilin said, "After hearing these words, I realized I couldn't do him any good because my Kung Fu skills were so poor, and my staying in the cave would block his way and prevent him from using his magical Huashan Sword Art...."

"He was just bragging! His Huashan Sword Art is just average. What makes it so invincible in the Martial World?" Dingyi snorted.

"Master, he was just trying to scare off Tian Boguang," Yilin said. "Hearing more and more abuses coming out of his mouth, I said unwillingly, 'Big brother Lao, I am leaving! Hope to see you later!'"

"'Get lost you smelly rotten duck egg,' he scolded. 'The further you get lost, the better! 'Once a man sees a nun, he loses all his bets!' I didn't see you before, and I will never see you again. Gambling is my favorite hobby; why would I ever want to see you again?'"

Hearing this, Dingyi could not contain her anger. She stood up and yelled in a stern voice, "That scum! Did you leave?"

"I was afraid to make him even angrier, so I left," Yilin said. "Once I stepped out of the cave, I heard the clash of weapons getting more and more intense. I figured that if the



villain Tian Boguang won, he would be after me again. If 'big brother Lao' won, after he came out and saw me outside of the cave, he would 'lose all his bets' because of me, so I clenched my teeth and ran as fast as I could to catch up with you, respectful Master. Then I could ask you to help fight the villain Tian Boguang."

Dingyi hummed and nodded.

"Master, Big Brother Linghu later lost his life; was that because of...of seeing me, and getting bad luck?" Yilin suddenly asked out of the blue.

"Drop that 'once a man sees a nun, he loses all his bets' nonsense!" Dingyi said angrily. "How could you have believed that? There are so many people here that have seen us, do all of them have bad luck now?"

People in the hall bit their lips to keep from commenting on her question.

"Yes, Master," Yilin answered. "I ran till dawn and saw the town gate of Hengyang in the horizon. I calmed down a little and thought that I could probably find Master in Hengyang. But who'd expected that right at that moment, Tian Boguang caught up with me. As soon as I saw him my legs went weak, and just after several steps, he caught me again. I thought that since he had chased me here, big brother Lao must have been murdered in the cave. I felt indescribable sadness.

"With so many people on the streets, Tian Boguang didn't dare be rude to me. He just said, 'If you follow me without making any trouble, I won't do anything bad to you. If you don't listen to me, then I will tear off your clothes right away and let all these people on the streets laugh at you.'

"I was very scared and dared not fight back, so I just followed him into the town. When we arrived at the Huiyan Wine House, he said, 'Little Sister, you have the type of natural beauty that will attract...attract even the wild geese to land. This Huiyan Wine House must have been opened just for you.<sup>34</sup> Let's go in and have a drink and some fun.'

"I said, 'We Buddhists don't eat flesh or drink alcohol. This is the rule of our White-Cloud Nunnery.'

"He said, 'I am sure you have lots of rules in your White-Cloud Nunnery. Are you really going to follow all of them? Later I will teach you how to break some more rules. Rules and regulations are all bogus. Your Master...your Master....'" At these words, she gave Dingyi a sneaky glance and dared not to continue.

"You don't need to mention the nonsense this villain spouted. Just say what happened next," Dingyi instructed.

Yilin answered, "Yes, Master. Then I said, 'You are talking nonsense, my Master would never hide in secret places to drink wine and eat dog meat.'"

The people in the hall simply could not help but laugh. Yilin did not repeat the words of Tian Boguang, yet from her own words, everyone knew what Tian Boguang must have said about Dingyi.

Dingyi made a sour face and thought, "This child is too honest. She doesn't know what to say and what not to."

Yilin continued, "The villain grabbed my collar and threatened, 'If you don't go up to the wine house and drink with me, I'll tear your clothes off.'

"I had no choice but to go up to the wine house with him. The villain ordered some wine and dishes. He was really mean. I told him that I couldn't eat flesh, yet he intentionally ordered dishes of beef, pork, poultry, and fish. He threatened that if I didn't eat, he would tear off my clothes. Master, I simply refused to eat those dishes. Buddhists are restricted from eating flesh. I couldn't violate the prohibition. If the villain wanted to tear off my clothes because of that, then fine, but it wouldn't be my fault.

"Right at that moment, a man walked up to the wine house. He had a sword hanging by his waist; his face was pale and his clothes were bloodstained. He sat at our table in silence, picked up the bowl of wine in front of me and poured all of it down his throat in a single gulp. He poured himself

another bowl of wine and raised the bowl toward Tian Boguang. 'Please!' he said. He turned to me and said, 'Please!' Then he drank that bowl as well.

"As soon as I heard his voice, I felt very surprised and very happy. It turned out he was 'big brother Lao' who had saved me in the cave. Thank Buddha! He escaped from Tian Boguang's murdering hands, but he had bloodstains all over him. In order to rescue me, he had been really badly wounded!

"Tian Boguang looked at him from head to toe and back again. 'It's you!'

"'It's me!' he replied.

"Tian Boguang raised his thumb to him and praised him, 'Good man!'

"He raised his thumb and replied, 'Good knife skills!'

"The two both began to laugh loudly and drink bowls of wine at the same time. I was quite surprised: They had fought so fiercely last night, why have they suddenly become friends now? I was very pleased to know that this man did not die, but since he was a friend of Tian Boguang, the villain, I became worried again.

"'You are not Lao Denuo!' Tian Boguang protested. 'Lao Denuo is a dried up old geezer. He can't be as young and carefree as you.'

"I sneaked a glance at him. He was only in his twenties, so last night when he said 'This old man has lived such a long life,' he was really fooling Tian Boguang.

"'I am not Lao Denuo,' the man admitted with a smile.

"Tian Boguang struck the table with his palm. 'Yeah, you are Huashan Linghu Chong. You're a somebody in the Martial World.'

"Big Brother Linghu admitted again. 'You really flatter me! Linghu Chong is only your defeated opponent. This is very embarrassing!' he said.

"'No fight, no acquaintance!' Tian Boguang grinned. 'Why don't we be friends? If brother Linghu likes this pretty

little nun, I'll just let you have her. I am not the kind who values chicks above friendship.'"

Dingyi's face turned dark, but she only murmured, "That evil rapist, that evil rapist...!"

Yilin almost began to cry again. "Master, Big Brother Linghu suddenly started scolding me again. 'This little nun has no color in her face,' he said. 'All she eats everyday are vegetables and bean curds; her face can't look that good. Brother Tian, I get real riled when I see nuns. I really wish I could exterminate all the nuns in the world!'

"'Why?' Tian Boguang asked while laughing.

"'To tell you the truth, I have a small hobby - gambling,' Big Brother Linghu said. 'Gambling is my life. Every time I see some dice, I'd forget my own name. But as soon as I see a nun, I can just forget about gambling for the rest of the day. No matter what I bet or gamble on, I will assuredly lose. This happens every single time. And it happens not only to me, but also to all my fellow apprentices of the Huashan Sword School. So every time when we, apprentices of the Huashan Sword School, see Uncle-Masters and apprentice sisters from the Heng-Shan Sword School, although everyone looks very respectful on the outside, we all curse our bad luck inside!'"

Dingyi simply could not stand this anymore; she turned her hand and gave Lao Denuo a resounding slap on the face. The move was fast and accurate. Lao Denuo had no chance of dodging it. He just felt great dizziness, and almost fell to the ground.

# **Chapter 4: Seat-Fighting**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Linghu Chong laughed loudly. “Little nun,” he said, “Do you want me to win or lose?” “Of course I want you to win,” Yilin said, “When you fight while sitting down, you are the second best in the world, you won’t lose to him.” “Good!” Linghu Chong said. “Then please go! The quicker the better, the further the merrier!”**

“Sister,” Liu Zhengfeng said, smiling politely, “there’s really no need to be so angry. Nephew apprentice Linghu only said that nonsense to Tian Boguang in order to rescue your brilliant little apprentice. Do you actually believe he meant what he said?”

“You mean he said all that in order to rescue Yilin?” Dingyi was surprised.

“That is my belief.” Liu Zhengfeng nodded. “Nephew apprentice Yilin, what do you think?”

“Big Brother Linghu was a good person, only...only a little bit without manners when he spoke. But Master, if you are going to be angry, I dare not continue!” Yilin lowered her head.

“Tell me everything! Tell everything without omitting any details. I want to know what on earth he was thinking, good or evil! If this fellow was really a rascal, then even though he’s dead, I will make old man Yue pay for it!” Dingyi yelled.

Yilin murmured a few words, but was too afraid to continue.

“Keep talking! Don’t be so concerned about him. Are you afraid that we won’t be able to distinguish between what’s good and what’s evil?” Dingyi demanded.

“Yes, Master!” Yilin said.

“‘Brother Tian,’ Big Brother Linghu said, ‘we are people of the Martial World – we live our lives on the sword’s edge. Someone with better-developed skills does possess certain advantages, but eventually, we all have to count on our luck. Don’t you agree? When facing someone that has about the

same level of fighting skills, life and death depends entirely on luck. This little nun is as scrawny as a chicken that weighs no more than three pounds. Even if she were as pretty as a goddess from heaven, I still wouldn't have anything to do with her. Life is definitely much more important. Putting women before friendship is wrong! Putting women before life is just plain stupid. It's to everyone's best interest that no one touches this little nun at all.'

“‘Brother Linghu,’ Tian Boguang sneered, ‘I thought you are a man that feared nothing. Why are you so superstitious about nuns?’

“‘Hey,’ Big Brother Linghu exclaimed, ‘I have really bad luck every time I see a nun. It's quite consistent. I simply can't ignore that fact. For example, I was perfectly fit last night before I met this little nun. Then, without even seeing her face, just by hearing her voice, I ended up with three stab wounds from you, which almost cost me my life. If this isn't bad luck, then what is?’

“‘That's right!’ Tian Boguang burst into loud laughter.

“Big Brother Linghu then said, ‘Brother Tian, I don't speak with nuns. Why don't you just let the little nun get lost, so we can enjoy our drinks in peace? Trust me! I am giving you valuable advice. Even one touch of that little nun will bring you incredibly bad luck, and when you wander about the Martial World, trouble will follow you everywhere, unless you become a monk yourself. How can you risk the Three Venoms of the World?’

“‘What are the Three Venoms of the World?’ Tian Boguang asked curiously.

“Big Brother Linghu put on a very surprised face. ‘Brother Tian,’ he said, ‘you have been to many places in the Martial World and experienced many things. How can you not know of the ‘Three Venoms of the World?’ It is indeed well said: Nuns, arsenic and golden striped snakes, do not touch for heaven's sake! Nun is the first venom, arsenic is another, and golden striped snake is the third. And if you notice, among



these three, nun is ranked number one. These words are common knowledge to the male apprentices in our Five Mountains Sword Alliance.”

Dingyi’s anger erupted like a volcano. She struck the table with her palm so heavily that it almost collapsed. “What a damn load of...,” she swore loudly. At the last moment, she managed to control herself and did not spit out the dirty word.

Lao Denuo, who had already learned his lesson, was keeping his distance from her. Seeing her angry red face, he instantly took another step back.

Liu Zhengfeng sighed. “Nephew apprentice Linghu had good intentions, but he may have gone a bit too far making up so much nonsense. But let’s look at it another way: when one talks with a villain like Tian Boguang, if he doesn’t speak with conviction, it can’t be easy to trick him.”

“Uncle-Master Liu, are you saying that Big Brother Linghu made everything up to fool Tian Boguang?” Yilin asked.

“Of course!” answered Liu Zhengfeng. “How could we have such silly and rude sayings in our Five Mountains Sword Alliance? Tomorrow, it will be time for my hand-washing ceremony. I definitely want to have good luck. If anyone had any prejudice with regard to your respectful school, why would Sister Dingyi and all these nephew apprentices be so courteously invited to my house?”

Hearing these words, Dingyi was slightly mollified. She acknowledged with a slight snort but complained, “What a foul mouth this Linghu Chong has! I wonder what scoundrel taught him his manners.” Obviously, the hidden meaning behind her comment was that she felt that Linghu Chong’s Master, the Head Master of Huashan Sword School, was also to blame for his student’s actions.

“Sister, please don’t be angry,” Liu Zhengfeng said. “That Tian Boguang has some top-notch Kung Fu skills. Nephew apprentice Linghu could not hope to beat him in a fight, and seeing that nephew apprentice Yilin was in great

danger, he had to make something up in the hope that the villain would let her go. Just think, Tian Boguang has been to many places in the Martial World and has experienced many things. It is not easy to fool him. Now, there are certainly some stupid people who are prejudiced against nuns; so nephew apprentice Linghu just used this as his hook. We live in this Martial World, and sometimes we have to do what is expedient. If nephew apprentice Linghu did not respect the Heng-Shan Sword School, if people of the Huashan Sword School, including Mr. Yue, did not sincerely respect the three senior Sisters, why would he try so hard to rescue an apprentice of the Heng-Shan Sword School?"

"Thank you for the kind words." Dingyi nodded. "So did Tian Boguang let you go because of that?" she turned back to Yilin.

"No," Yilin shook her head.

"Big Brother Linghu then said, 'Brother Tian, your Qing-Gong is the best in the world, but if you are cursed, you can never outrun your bad luck, no matter how good your Qing-Gong is.'

"Tian Boguang seemed a little tentative. He glanced at me, and then shook his head. 'I come alone and leave alone, going where I please. Why get so worked up? Since we have already seen this little nun, why not just let her stay here and accompany us?'

"Right in that instant, a young man from the next table suddenly drew his sword and rushed in front of Tian Boguang. 'Are you...are you Tian Boguang?' he yelled.

"'I am. And?' Tian Boguang answered.

"'You evil rapist,' the young man exclaimed, 'I'm going to kill you! Everyone in the Martial World wants you dead, yet here you are, bold as can be. You must be longing for death!' He thrust his sword at Tian Boguang. The moves he used were from the Taishan Sword School sword art style. And that was him, the apprentice brother." She pointed at the corpse on the door plank.

“Chi Baicheng, what a good lad! Very good!” Priest Tian-Men nodded.

Yilin went on with the story.

“Tian Boguang made a slight movement of his body and a knife suddenly appeared in his hand. ‘Sit down. Sit down. Drink wine. Drink!’ he said with a smile. Then he put his knife back into its sheath.

“No one knew exactly how it happened, but the apprentice brother of the Taishan Sword School had been slashed across the chest. Blood gushed from the knife wound. He stared at Tian Boguang, stumbled a little, and then fell down on the floor.”

She turned and glanced at Priest Tian-Song. “That Uncle-Master of the Taishan Sword School immediately rushed forward to confront Tian Boguang, and started a vigorous attack. The moves that Uncle-Master used were very good, but Tian Boguang remained seated and simply blocked them with his knife. That Uncle-Master attacked with over thirty moves, and Tian Boguang blocked every one of them while sitting down; he did not even bother to stand up.”

Priest Tian-Men’s face turned dark. He looked at the apprentice brother lying on the door plank.

“Junior apprentice brother, was that villain’s Kung Fu really this good?” he asked.

Priest Tian-Song gave a long sigh and turned his head away slowly.

Yilin continued, “Then Big Brother Linghu drew his sword and thrust it at Tian Boguang as well. Tian Boguang blocked the thrust with his knife and stood up.”

“That cannot be right!” Dingyi cut her off. “Priest Tian-Song attacked with over thirty moves, yet Tian Boguang did not stand up. Why did he stand up when Linghu Chong only attacked once? How could Linghu Chong’s Kung Fu be better than Priest Tian-Song’s?”

“Tian Boguang had his reasons,” Yilin explained. “‘Brother Linghu,’ Tian Boguang said, ‘I look upon you as a

friend. When you attack me, if I remain seated, it would be disrespectful. Although my Kung Fu skills are better than yours, I respect your personality, so no matter who wins the fight, I have to stand up to fight. But for that bull...bull-nose...well, it's a different story.'

"‘Hmm,’ Big Brother Linghu said, ‘thank you for the courtesy. You are giving me too much praise.’ Then he attacked with three continuous thrusts. Master, the three thrusts were so swift and fierce, the flash of the sword covered Tian Boguang’s entire upper body....”

“That is one of old man Yue’s valued moves called something like ‘Three Peaks of Mount Huashan’.” Dingyi nodded. “It is said that the second thrust is fiercer than the first one, and the third one is even fiercer than the second one. So how did Tian Boguang fend that off?”

“Tian Boguang blocked one thrust and took a step back, blocked another thrust and took another step, so he stepped back a total of three paces. ‘Nice moves!’ he cheered, and then turned to Uncle-Master Tian-Song. ‘Hey, bull-nose! Why didn’t you join him and attack me together?’ Right after Big Brother Linghu began the first thrust, Uncle-Master Tian-Song stepped back and just stood by the side, watching.

“‘I am a gentleman of honor from the Taishan Sword School. Why would I humiliate myself by fighting side by side with such an evil rapist?’ Uncle-Master replied coldly.

“‘Don’t be mistaken about apprentice brother Linghu,’ I could not help saying, ‘he is a good person!’

“‘He is a good person? Ha-ha, he is a wonderful person that commits evil deeds with Tian Boguang!’ Uncle-Master Tian-Song sneered.

“Suddenly, Uncle-Master Tian-Song uttered a loud cry and then pressed his hands to his chest with a great look of disbelief on his face. Tian Boguang returned his knife to its sheath. ‘Sit down. Sit down! Drink wine! Drink!’ he said.

“Seeing blood seeping through Uncle-Master Tian-Song’s fingers, I had no idea what kind of magic knife move Tian

Boguang had just used. I didn't even see him moving his arm or swinging his knife, and Uncle-Master Tian-Song had already been wounded in the chest. The thrust must have been executed with extreme speed. I was so scared, I started screaming, 'Don't...don't kill him!'

"Tian Boguang grinned, 'The little beauty says no killing, I won't kill you then!' he said.

"Uncle-Master Tian-Song covered his wound with his hands and rushed down the stairs. Big Brother Linghu was about to run after him and help, but Tian Boguang grabbed him. 'Brother Linghu,' he said, 'this bull-nose is too arrogant. He would rather die than ask for your help. Why go asking for trouble?' Big Brother Linghu shook his head, let out a wry smile, and poured two full bowls of wine down his throat.

"Master, I was thinking, we Buddhists have five primary prohibitions, and the fifth one is the prohibition against alcohol. Although Big Brother Linghu was no Buddhist, it was still not good to drink wine nonstop like that. But I dared not say a thing to him, afraid that he was going to scold me and say something like 'Once one sees a nun....'"

"Those insane words of Linghu Chong should never be mentioned again," Dingyi admonished.

"Yes, Master!" Yilin answered.

"What happened after that?" Dingyi asked.

"'That bull-nose's Kung Fu is not bad at all,' Tian Boguang said. 'My attack wasn't slow, yet he was able to move three inches back and barely escape my deathblow. Taishan Sword School's Kung Fu has some real stuff. Brother Linghu, since this bull-nose ran away alive, you're probably going to have quite a bit trouble after today. I intended to kill him just now and save you from further trouble, but too bad, I didn't quite make it.'

"'I get into trouble everyday,' Big Brother Linghu said with a smile. 'Forget about that darned trouble. Let's drink. Brother Tian, if you had chopped the same way at me earlier

- my Kung Fu is no match for Uncle-Master Tian-Song - I wouldn't have made it out alive.'

"'I held back some when I fought with you,' Tian Boguang grinned. 'That's because I wanted to thank you for not killing me in the cave last night.'

"I felt very confused. Does that mean Big Brother Linghu was actually the winner when they fought in the cave, and Big Brother Linghu showed mercy and spared his life?"

At these words, everybody showed a disapproving face. They all thought that Linghu Chong shouldn't have been so courteous to Tian Boguang, who was such an evil rapist.

Yilin went on, "'Last night in the cave,' Big Brother Linghu said, 'I had already tried my best. My skills are not as good as yours. How dare I show you mercy?'

"Tian Boguang burst into a loud laugh. 'When you and the little nun were hiding in the cave,' he said, 'the little nun made a noise and I discovered her whereabouts, but you were still holding your breath and I really had no idea that someone else was also hiding in the shadows. I was about to grab the little nun and break all her prohibitions. All you had to do was to wait a little bit longer till I was fully enjoying myself, and then thrust your sword. You could have easily sent me on my way. Brother Linghu, you are not a twelve-year-old boy; you know how things are done. I know you are a true man of honor who does not want to kill from behind one's back, that's why you only poked me slightly on my shoulder.'

"Big Brother Linghu rebuffed him, 'If I had waited a little bit longer, the little nun would have already been humiliated by you. Listen to me. Yes, I get angry every time I see a nun, but since Heng-Shan Sword School is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and you were attacking one of its members. Something like that can not be tolerated.'

"'Well,' Tian Boguang grinned. 'If you had just stabbed three inches deeper, I would have lost my whole arm. Why did you draw back your sword after you poked me?'

“‘I am an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School,’ Big Brother Linghu said. ‘I don’t attack people from behind. You chopped me in the shoulder earlier. I stabbed you in the shoulder as payback to get even, so we could fight a fair fight. Nobody would have any advantage on the other.’

“Tian Boguang laughed loudly. ‘Great! I am glad to make you a friend. Come on, let’s drink another bowl.’

“‘My Kung Fu may not be as good as yours, but my drinking tolerance is much better than yours,’ Big Brother Linghu said.

“‘Are you sure? I don’t think so. You want a contest? Come on, let’s first drink ten bowls of wine each,’ Tian Boguang proposed.

“‘Brother Tian,’ Big Brother Linghu said with a frown, ‘I thought you were a real man who wouldn’t take advantage of others, that’s why I wanted to bet on the drinking contest. But apparently I was wrong. I am really disappointed.’

“Tian Boguang looked at him from the corner of his eyes. ‘How am I taking advantage of you?’ he asked.

“‘You know very well that I don’t like nuns,’ Big Brother Linghu said. ‘Every time I see a nun I feel uncomfortable and lose my appetite. How can I still have a drinking contest with you?’

“Tian Boguang laughed again. ‘Brother Linghu,’ he said, ‘I know you are trying every trick you can to save this little nun. But I love beautiful women more than my own life. I’ve picked this beautiful little nun, and I’ll never let her go. If you want me to set her free, there is only one way to make me.’

“‘All right, spit it out then,’ Big Brother Linghu said. ‘Even if I have to go up a hill of knives or swim in a pot of boiling oil, I’ll do it. If I hesitate at your request, then I am not a true man.’

“Tian Boguang filled two bowls with wine. ‘Drink this bowl of wine and then I’ll tell you,’ he said with a big grin.

“Big Brother Linghu picked up the bowl and said, ‘Bottom’s up!’ then gulped the wine down his throat. Tian

Boguang also drank a bowl of wine. 'Brother Linghu,' he said, 'I see you as my friend. The rule of the Martial World is that there will be no molestation of a friend's wife. If you agree to marry this little nun...little nun....'" Yilin's face blushed while she spoke out these words. She stared at her feet and her voice became softer and softer. At the last word, her voice was so low that people could hardly discern her words.

Dingyi struck the table with her palm and yelled, "Nonsense! More and more obscenity! What happened after that?"

In a very soft tone Yilin said, "Tian Boguang kept spouting nonsense. 'For a true man, once his word is given, even a wagon with four horses cannot drag it back. If you agree to marry...marry her, I'll let her go right away. I will also bow to her and apologize to her. There is no other way but that!'

"'Bah!' Big Brother Linghu rebuffed. 'Do you want me to have bad luck for the rest of my life? Never mention that again.'

"Tian Boguang then said a lot more nonsense such as - once the hair grows back, a nun is not a nun anymore - and a lot of other crazy words that are too ridiculous to speak aloud. I covered up my ears and tried not to listen.

"'Shut up!' Big Brother Linghu cried out. 'Stop making such crass jokes. You are driving me insane! How can I still participate in the contest when I am going insane? If you don't let her go, then let's fight till one of us drops dead.'

"'You are no match for me in a fight!' Tian Boguang said with a smirk.

"'If we fight while standing up,' Big Brother Linghu said, 'I am not good enough to challenge you. But if we fight while sitting down, you are no match for me!'"

Everyone still remembered from Yilin's story that Tian Boguang blocked over twenty fierce attacks from a Taishan Sword School master, Priest Tian-Song, without leaving his seat. It was quite obvious he was very good at fighting while



sitting down. Apparently, Linghu Chong was intentionally trying to irritate him with those words.

“When one meets with such a villain, it might be a good idea to irritate him first before attacking,” He Sanqi said with a nod.

“Hearing these words,” Yilin went on, “Tian Boguang did not get angry at all. He simply said with a grin, ‘Brother Linghu, Tian Boguang admires your courage and personality, not your Kung Fu.’”

“Big Brother Linghu immediately followed, ‘Linghu Chong admires your fast knife strokes while standing up, but not your fast knife strokes while sitting down.’”

“‘There’s something you don’t know,’ Tian Boguang explained. ‘When I was a young boy, my legs had problems. For two years, I was only able to practice my knife skills sitting down. Fighting while sitting down is actually my specialty. Just now when I was fighting the bull...bull...priest, I wasn’t really deriding his skills; I was just used to fighting while sitting down, so I got lazy and didn’t bother to stand up. Brother Linghu, you are not as good as I am in this department.’”

“‘Brother Tian, there’s something you don’t know either,’ Big Brother Linghu also began explaining. ‘Because of the problems of your legs, you had to practice your knife skills while sitting down for two years. That was only two years. My other Kung Fu skills are not as good, but fighting while sitting down, I am really better. I practice my sword skills while sitting down every single day.’”

At these words, all eyes turned toward Lao Denuo, all wondering, “Is there really a special Huashan sword form that is practiced while sitting down?”

Lao Denuo shook his head. “Big Apprentice Brother was just kidding. Our sword school does not have such martial arts.”

Yilin went on with the story, “Tian Boguang appeared to be taken by surprise. ‘Really?’ he said. ‘Then I must be

ignorant. I'd like to see this Huashan Sword School's Sit... Sit...What's the name of the sword art?'

"‘This sword art was not taught by my respectful Master. I created it myself,’ Big Brother Linghu grinned.

"Tian Boguang's face turned solemn at these words. 'I see,' he said. 'Brother Linghu, you must be a genius. That is very admirable!'"

Everyone in the hall knew exactly why Tian Boguang was so moved. In one's study of the Martial Arts, it was very difficult to create a new set of sword arts or hand fighting forms. One would have to have both first-class Kung Fu skills and outstanding knowledge and intelligence to find a way to create new moves. A big school like the Huashan Sword School had been in existence for several hundred years. Each of Huashan Sword School's martial arts moves was improved and tested thousands of times. It would have been very difficult to even modify just one of its existing moves, let alone create a new set of sword arts.

"Did Big Apprentice Brother create a new set of sword arts?" Lao Denuo thought to himself. "How come he never mentioned this to Master?"

Yilin continued, "Big Brother Linghu grinned. 'This set of sword arts is very smelly. There is nothing to admire about it.'

"Tian Boguang was confused. 'Why is it very smelly?' he asked. I was also very confused. A set of sword arts could be bad; how could it be smelly?

"Big Brother Linghu then explained, 'Well, to tell you the truth, every morning when I go to the bathroom and sit on the toilet, there are always annoying flies flying around, so I would pick up my sword and try to kill the flies. In the beginning, I could hardly hit any of the flies, but after many days, my thrusts got better, and I could hit some of them. Gradually, my mind and thrusts worked in harmony, and I was able to create a set of sword arts out of thrusting at the flies. When I use this sword art, I am always sitting on a toilet, so of course it would be a bit smelly.'

"Hearing this, I could not help laughing. Big Brother Linghu was so funny. How could anyone practice sword arts like that? But when Tian Boguang heard these words, his face turned livid.

"'Brother Linghu,' he said angrily, 'I see you as a friend, but what you said is just going too far. Are you saying that I am just a fly in the toilet? Well, then let me take a look at your...your...!'"

People in the hall could not help nodding. It was well known that when first-class Kung Fu masters fought, if one became impetuous, then he would have lost thirty percent of his chances of winning. Linghu Chong's words were obviously intended to enrage Tian Boguang, and now that Tian Boguang did get angry, he had already stepped into the trap.

"Very good!" Dingyi remarked. "And then?"

Yilin went on, "Big Brother Linghu chuckled. 'I practice this sword art just for fun, and never intended to use it to fight with anybody. Brother Tian, please don't get the wrong impression. I would never compare you to a fly in the toilet.' I couldn't help laughing again.

"Tian Boguang got even angrier. He pulled out his knife and smacked it on the table. 'Well, then let's all sit down and see who's better.' Seeing the fierce look in his eyes, I was very frightened. Obviously he had decided to kill Big Brother Linghu.

"Big Brother Linghu said, 'Fighting while sitting down, my Kung Fu is better, and you can't possibly win. We just became good friends, brother Tian, why ruin our relationship? Besides, Linghu Chong is a true man. I don't want to use what I am really good at to take advantage of a friend.'

"'I wish for it myself; nobody will blame you for taking advantage of me,' Tian Boguang scoffed.

"'Brother Tian, are you sure you really want it?' Big Brother Linghu asked.

"'Definitely!' Tian Boguang said without hesitation.

“‘And you are sure you want to fight while we sit down?’ Big Brother Linghu asked again.

“‘Yes! Definitely fight while sitting down!’ Tian Boguang confirmed again.

“‘Big Brother Linghu then said, ‘Alright! If you say so! But we have to establish some rules first. Here it goes: before one can claim to be the victor, whoever stands up loses the contest.’

“‘Exactly! Before one can claim to be the victor, whoever stands up loses the contest,’ Tian Boguang agreed.

“‘So what penalty shall we give to the loser?’ Big Brother Linghu asked.

“‘Whatever you say,’ Tian Boguang answered.

“‘Let me think about it,’ Big Brother Linghu requested. He paused for a second and then said, ‘Very well! First, starting from today, if the loser sees the little nun again, he shall behave himself. No impolite behavior or words. And as soon as he sees her, he shall bow in respect and say, ‘Little Sister, apprentice Tian Boguang asks after your health.’

“‘Bah, what do you mean? How do you know I am going to lose? What if you lose?’ Tian Boguang complained.

“‘Same for me,’ Big Brother Linghu answered without hesitation. ‘No matter who loses, he shall have to submit to Heng-Shan Sword School to be the grand-apprentice of Old Sister Dingyi and apprentice of this little nun.’

“‘Master, don’t you think Big Brother Linghu was very funny? If the fight was between them, why would the loser have to submit to our Heng-Shan Sword School? And how could I take them as my apprentices?’ After these words, a slight smile appeared on her face. Her face had always looked upset before, but now when she smiled, it seemed as if a ray of sunshine had brightened the room.

“‘These crude people will say anything. Don’t listen to them. Linghu Chong was just trying to enrage Tian Boguang,’ Dingyi said. After saying these words, she raised her head a little and narrowed her eyes, trying to figure out

how Linghu Chong could win the fight. If he lost the fight, how could he go back on his word? She thought for a while and knew that her own intelligence was far less than the rascal Linghu Chong. It would just be a waste of energy. So she asked, "What did Tian Boguang say?"

"Seeing Big Brother Linghu speak with such confidence," Yilin said, "Tian Boguang showed a little hesitation. I guess he was a little worried. Maybe he was thinking that Big Brother Linghu could really have some outstanding fighting skills when sitting down."

"Big Brother Linghu kept nudging him, 'If you really don't want to submit to the Heng-Shan Sword School, then we'd better not have this contest.'"

"'Nonsense!' Tian Boguang exclaimed angrily. 'Alright, I agree! Whoever loses will have the little nun as his Master!'"

"'I cannot have you as my apprentices,' I said in a hurry. 'My Kung Fu skills are too weak, and my Master wouldn't let me either. All the people in our Heng-Shan Sword School, Buddhists or not, are female. How can we...how can we...?'"

"Big Brother Linghu waved me off. 'I have made the decision with brother Tian. You simply have to accept it, whether you want to or not. It's not your call.' He then turned to Tian Boguang and said, 'Second, the loser will have to swing his knife and make himself a eunuch.' Master, what does 'swing his knife and make himself a eunuch' mean?"

Many people started chuckling. Dingyi could not help but grin herself, and a smile finally showed on her strict face. "Those were dirty words from the mouth of a rascal," she said. "Good child, it is alright if you don't understand. You don't need to understand. Those are bad words."

"Oh, so those were bad words," Yilin said. "I thought since there are emperors, of course there will be eunuchs, <sup>35</sup> what's all the fuss about?"

"Tian Boguang stared at Big Brother Linghu. 'Brother Linghu,' he asked, 'you are really sure you will win?'"

“‘Sure!’ Big Brother Linghu answered. ‘Fighting while standing up, I rank eighty-nine among the Kung Fu people in the Martial World, but fighting while sitting down, I rank at number two!’

“Tian Boguang became curious. ‘If you are number two, then who is number one?’ he asked.

“‘The Chief of the Demon Cult, Dongfang Invincible!’ Big Brother Linghu said.”

Hearing the name “Chief of the Demon Cult, Dongfang Invincible,” everybody’s face changed color. Noticing the sudden change in facial expressions, Yilin breathed nervously, feeling afraid that she might have said something wrong. “Master,” she asked, “did I say something wrong?”

“Just don’t mention that person’s name,” Dingyi said. “So what did Tian Boguang say?”

Yilin answered, “Tian Boguang nodded. ‘Chief Dongfang ranks number one, I totally agree,’ he said. ‘But calling yourself number two seems to be a bit cocky. Can you even defeat your own Master, Mr. Yue?’

“‘I am only talking about fighting while sitting down,’ Big Brother Linghu said. ‘Fighting while standing up, my Master ranks at number eight, and I am only number eighty-nine, far behind the respectful Master.’

“‘I see,’ Tian Boguang nodded in agreement. ‘Then fighting while standing up, where do I stand? And who did the ranking?’

“‘This is a big secret,’ Big Brother Linghu said in a confidential tone. ‘Brother Tian, since I am having a good chat with you, I might as well tell you. But never let this out, otherwise it can cause great upheaval in the entire Martial World. Three months ago, the five Head Masters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance had a meeting at Mount Huashan to discuss the skills of the famous Kung Fu masters in the Martial World. While they were in a good mood, they decided to rank the masters in the Martial World just for fun. Brother Tian, to be frank, although the five Masters really disliked

your personality, they had great regard for your Kung Fu skills. Fighting while standing up, you can be ranked at number fourteen.’”

Priest Tian-Men and Sister Dingyi exclaimed in unison, “Linghu Chong was talking nonsense! Nothing like that ever happened!”

“So Big Brother Linghu was just fooling him again?” Yilin asked. “Well, Tian Boguang didn’t completely believe him either. He said, ‘The Head Masters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance are all outstanding and famous martial artists in the Martial World. They actually ranked me at number fourteen? That is really overwhelming. So brother Linghu, did you present your smelly Toilet Sword Art in front of the five Head Masters? If not, how did they rank you at number two?’”

“Big Brother Linghu said with a grin, ‘This Toilet Sword Art would be too embarrassing to show in public, especially in front of the five Head Masters. The sword art looks very ugly, but the moves are very ferocious. I was discussing it with some masters from heretical clans, and they all thought that nobody except Chief Dongfang could defeat the sword art. But brother Tian, I have to say that even though my sword art is very fierce, besides using it to kill flies when sitting on a toilet, it is really quite useless. Think about it, when you are really fighting with somebody, who would agree to sit down and not move? Even though we agreed to fight sitting down, as soon as you start to lose, of course you would get mad and stand up. You are ranked at number fourteen fighting while standing up, so with no effort, you could easily split me, the number two fighting while sitting down, into halves with just one chop. See, your number fourteen fighting while standing up is the real thing, and my number two fighting while sitting down is just a novel trick. It’s nothing to be proud of.’”

“‘Hmm, brother Linghu, you are really glib,’ Tian Boguang said. ‘How do you know I will definitely lose to you

fighting while sitting down? How do you know I will get mad and stand up to kill you?’

“‘Well,’ Big Brother Linghu said, ‘if you agree not to kill me after you lose, then I won’t insist on the enu...eunuch rule. So you won’t have to worry about having no descendants. Ok, enough talk already, let’s fight!’

“He raised his arm and flipped the table. The table, together with all the wine kettles and bowls, flew to the side. The two just sat there, face to face. One held a knife; the other grabbed hold of a sword.

“‘Go ahead,’ Big Brother Linghu yelled, ‘start your attack! Whoever stands up first – his butt leaving the chair – loses.’

“‘All right!’ Tian Boguang also yelled. ‘Let’s see who’s going to stand up first!’

“Right before they started fighting, Tian Boguang glanced at me and then suddenly burst into loud laughter. ‘Brother Linghu,’ he said, ‘well done! So you have set up an ambush in advance, and intentionally set limits on my actions. As we fight while sitting down, not being able to leave the chair, all your helpers will rush out – or even if they don’t, just this little nun playing some trick behind my back might force me to stand up.’

“Big Brother Linghu also laughed loudly. ‘If anyone helps me, then Linghu Chong is the loser. Little nun, do you want me to win or lose?’

“‘Of course I want you to win,’ I said. ‘When you fight while sitting down, you are the second best in the world, so you won’t lose to him.’

“‘Good,’ Big Brother Linghu said. ‘Then please go! The quicker the better, the further the merrier! With a bald headed little nun in front of me, I don’t need to go through the motions, I will have already lost.’ He did not wait for Tian Boguang to comment and thrust his sword at him.

“Tian Boguang waved his knife and blocked the attack. ‘Outstanding!’ he smiled. ‘Outstanding! What a great plan to



rescue the little nun. Brother Linghu, you are truly a babe... babe-hound. But the risk is a bit too high this time.'

"By then I finally realized: Big Brother Linghu's mentioning again and again that whoever stands up first loses was to give me a chance to run away. Tian Boguang could not leave his chair, so of course he would not be able to catch me."

Hearing this, the listeners all praised, in their hearts, the great effort Linghu Chong had made. His skills were not as good as Tian Boguang's. Other than by using this stratagem, there really wasn't any other way to help Yilin get away.

"The words 'babe-hound' etc. are all rude words. Never mention them again. Don't ever even think about them in your heart," Dingyi admonished.

Yilin lowered her head. "Yes, Master. So those were rude words too. I see."

"So you left right away, right?" Dingyi asked. "Once Tian Boguang killed Linghu Chong, you wouldn't be able to get away anymore."

"Yes," Yilin said. "Big Brother Linghu urged me again and again, so finally I bowed to him and said, 'Thank you, apprentice brother Linghu, for saving me!' Then I turned around to leave. When I got to the stairway, I heard Tian Boguang shouting, 'Gotcha!' When I looked back, two drops of blood splashed onto my clothes. Big Brother Linghu had taken a cut to the shoulder.

"Tian Boguang smirked, 'Well, I think your number two ranking sword art while sitting down is really nothing special!'

"The little nun is still here,' Big Brother Linghu said, 'how am I to beat you? I am doomed to fail from bad luck!'

"I figured since Big Brother Linghu really disliked nuns, if I stayed any longer, he might really die because of me, so I rushed down the stairs. After I got out of the wine house, I could still hear all the clang of metal made by the sword and knife.

“Then Tian Boguang shouted again, ‘Gotcha!’ I was very worried and knew that Big Brother Linghu must have taken another cut, but I dared not to go up to the wine house again. I climbed up the roof of the wine house from the side of the building, and bent over the roof to look inside the window. What I saw was very frightening. Big Brother Linghu was still fighting fiercely with his sword, with blood all over him. Tian Boguang, on the other hand, was not hurt at all.

“After another while, Tian Boguang shouted again, ‘Gotcha!’ He slashed Big Brother Linghu’s left arm and then pulled back his knife. ‘Brother Linghu, I am being nice this time!’ he said with a smile.

“‘I know. If you had cut a little deeper, my left arm would be gone by now!’ Big Brother Linghu answered, also with a smile.

“Master, how was he still able to smile in such a bad condition?

“‘You still want to fight?’ Tian Boguang asked.

“‘Of course I do! Did I stand up?’ Big Brother Linghu said.

“‘I suggest you give it up and stand up!’ Tian Boguang said. ‘Forget about the bet. You don’t have to ask that little nun to be your master.’

“Big Brother Linghu said, ‘For a true man, once his word is out, even a wagon with four horses cannot drag it back. I gave my word; I am still accountable.’

“Tian Boguang complimented him, ‘I’ve seen many tough guys before. But this is the first time I see a true hero, brother Linghu. Fine! Let’s call it a tie and stop right here, alright?’

“Big Brother Linghu just looked at him with a smile and said nothing. Blood kept flowing from his different wounds and dripping onto the wood floor. Tian Boguang lowered his knife and was just about to stand up when he suddenly remembered that he would have lost if he had stood up. His body had moved upward a little when he quickly sat back down and did not leave the chair.

“‘Brother Tian, you are clever!’ Big Brother Linghu grinned.”

Everyone could not help but let out an “Ah” of pity for Linghu Chong.

Yilin continued. “Tian Boguang picked up his knife again. ‘I am going to use my fast strokes now,’ he said. ‘If I wait any longer, the little nun will have run to wonderland, and I won’t be able to keep up with her anymore.’

“I trembled when I heard his words. I also worried that Big Brother Linghu might get killed by him, but I had no clue as to what to do next. Then a thought popped into my head: Big Brother Linghu fought so hard against him just to rescue me. The only way to save Big Brother Linghu’s life was to commit suicide right in front of them. So I unsheathed the broken sword by my waist, ready to jump into the wine house. Right at that moment, Big Brother Linghu’s body swayed suddenly, and he collapsed onto the floor together with his chair. He pushed on the ground with his hands and struggled to get up with the chair at his back, but he was so badly wounded that he just couldn’t get up.

“Tian Boguang was quite content, and with a big smile on his face, he said, ‘Number two for sitting down. What rank for crawling?’ With those words, he stood up.

“Big Brother Linghu burst into loud laughter. ‘You lost!’ he said.

“Tian Boguang laughed hard. ‘You were just defeated in such an embarrassing manner, and you are calling me a loser?’

“‘What did we agree on?’ Big Brother Linghu asked while lying on the floor.

“‘We agreed that we fight while sitting down,’ Tian Boguang answered, ‘and whoever stands up first – his butt leaving the chair – is...is...is...!’ He stuttered the word ‘is’ three times but could not finish his sentence. He could only point at Big Brother Linghu with his finger in disbelief. He had just realized that this was a trick and he had been

fooled. He had already stood up, but Big Brother Linghu had not stood up and his rear end was still touching the chair. Although his body was in a very embarrassing position, but according to the agreement, he had already won."

People in the hall started applauding and cheering. Only Yu Canghai gave a disgruntled snort and scoffed, "A rascal playing unscrupulous tricks with the rapist Tian Boguang; what an embarrassment to all decent schools!"

"What kind of crap is that?" Dingyi said angrily. "A true man fights with his brain, not his muscles. I did not see any one in your Qingcheng Sword School act so bravely." Hearing from Yilin about how Linghu Chong had saved the Heng-Shan Sword School's reputation with no regard to his own safety, she felt very thankful deep in her heart, and had already disregarded all negative thoughts about Linghu Chong.

Yu Canghai snorted. "What a wonderful crawling young hero!"

"Your Qingcheng Sword School...!" Dingyi started yelling when Liu Zhengfeng cut her short, afraid to see conflict between them again.

"Nephew apprentice, did Tian Boguang admit defeat?" he asked Yilin.

"Tian Boguang stood there staring blankly at the floor and could not make up his mind," Yilin went on.

"'Little apprentice sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School, you can come down now,' Big Brother Linghu shouted. 'Congratulations on getting a first-class apprentice!' It turned out that he already knew I was sneaking about on the roof.

"Tian Boguang is a bad man, but he does keep his word. He could have just stepped up and killed Big Brother Linghu easily with a single blow, and then turned around to catch me, but he simply shouted out, 'Little nun, listen up! If you ever dare see me again, I will finish you off with a single chop.'

"I never wanted to have the villain as my apprentice in the first place, so his words were like music to my ears. Tian

Boguang shoved his knife back into its sheath, and then stormed out of the wine house. I then jumped down into the wine house, helped Big Brother Linghu up, and took out the 'Heavenly Connecting Glue' to put on his wounds. After counting the wounds, I found up to thirteen different ones on his body...."

"Sister Dingyi, congratulations!" Yu Canghai suddenly cut in.

"Congratulation for what?" Dingyi gave him a hard stare.

"Congratulations for getting such a reputable and master-level new grand-apprentice!"

Dingyi was enraged. She struck the table heavily and stood up.

"Master Yu, you're at fault this time. How can we Taoists make such silly jokes?" Priest Tian-Men cut in.

Knowing that first of all, he was in the wrong, and secondly, Priest Tian-Men would be a tough opponent, Yu Canghai turned his head away and pretended not to hear anything.

Yilin continued, "I finished dressing Big Brother Linghu's wounds and then helped him up to sit on the chair. Big Brother Linghu was breathing very heavily. 'Would you please pour a bowl of wine for me?' he requested. I poured the wine and handed him the bowl. Then footsteps came from the stairway, and two men walked in. He was one of the two." She pointed at the Qingcheng apprentice who had carried Luo Renjie's body in a while ago. Then she said, "The other one was the villain Luo Renjie. They looked at me and then looked at Big Brother Linghu and then looked back at me with very impolite stares."

The listeners all thought: when Luo Renjie and his companion saw the blood-covered Linghu Chong sitting together with a beautiful nun in the wine house, and the little nun was pouring wine for him, they would certainly feel very awkward. Then staring impolitely would not be an unusual reaction.

Yilin kept on telling the story. "Big Brother Linghu glanced at Luo Renjie and then asked, 'Apprentice sister, do you know what Kung Fu the Qingcheng Sword School is best at?'

"'I don't know. I heard that the Qingcheng Sword School has many good Kung Fu skills,' I replied.

"'Correct!' Big Brother Linghu said. 'The Qingcheng Sword School has many good Kung Fu skills. But the best one, ha-ha, I'd better not mention it to avoid conflict.' Then he gave Luo Renjie a stare back.

"Hearing his words, Luo Renjie rushed forward. 'Which one is the best one? Spit it out!' he yelled.

"'I didn't want to say it,' Big Brother Linghu smirked. 'But you really want me to say it, right? It's a move called 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand'.'

"Luo Renjie struck the table with his palm and bellowed, 'Nonsense! What is 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand'? I've never heard of it!'

"'This is the very special skill of your respectful school, how can you not have heard about it?' Big Brother Linghu chuckled. 'Turn around, I'll show you the move.'

"Luo Renjie started swearing at Big Brother Linghu and suddenly threw a punch at him. Big Brother Linghu tried to stand up and dodge it, but because he had lost too much blood and did not have much strength to move, he tumbled and then sat back down on the chair. The punch landed squarely on his nose. Blood immediately started flowing. Luo Renjie punched him again and I hurriedly blocked his fist with my hand.

"'Don't hit him!' I demanded. 'Can't you see he is badly wounded? Bullying a badly wounded man, what kind of a man are you?'

"Luo Renjie scolded, 'Ha, this little nun thinks this rascal is so handsome and has fallen for him! Get out of the way. If you don't, I'll beat you up too.'

“‘If you dare to hit me, I’ll tell your Master Yu.’ I threatened.

“‘Ha-ha, you didn’t follow your nun rules and violated the moral prohibitions; anyone can punish you,’ Luo said. Master, wasn’t he wronging innocent people?

“He poked his left hand toward me. I tried to block it, but didn’t notice it was a feint. Then his right hand suddenly stretched out and pinched my left cheek. He began to laugh loudly. I was very angry and fought back with three palm heel strikes, but he dodged them all.

“‘Apprentice sister,’ Big Brother Linghu called out to me. ‘Don’t fight him. Let me get my breathing going, then I’ll be just fine.’ I turned to look at him; his face was so pale.

“Luo Renjie ran to him and punched at him again. Big Brother Linghu deflected Luo’s punch with his left palm and redirected it, which turned Luo’s own body around, and then he threw a kick and it landed right on his...his rear end. The kick was quick and accurate, swift and smooth. Luo Renjie could not keep his balance and rolled all the way down the stairs.

“‘Apprentice sister,’ Big Brother Linghu whispered to me. ‘This is their Qingcheng Sword School’s best move called ‘Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand.’ Bum Bum back is where they get ready to be kicked, then geese landing... landing...in sand. Don’t you think it was an accurate description?’

“I wanted to laugh, but I became really worried when I saw his face getting paler and paler. ‘Take a rest, and don’t talk,’ I said. Blood gushed out from his wounds again, obviously because he used too much strength when he threw the kick and the wounds opened up again.

“Luo Renjie rushed back immediately, after rolling down the staircase, with a sword in his hand this time. ‘You are Huashan Linghu Chong, aren’t you?’ he yelled.

“Big Brother Linghu grinned. ‘You are already the third master of your respectful school who used this ‘Bum Bum

Back, Geese Landing in Sand' on me. No wonder...no wonder....' He started to cough badly. Fearing that Luo Renjie might harm him, I drew my sword and stood by his side, guarding him.

"Luo Renjie turned to his fellow apprentice. 'Junior apprentice Li, you deal with this little nun,' he commanded. The Li villain answered and unsheathed his sword to attack me.

"While defending myself with my sword, I saw Luo Renjie thrusting his sword again and again at Big Brother Linghu, and Big Brother Linghu could hardly raise his sword to fend him off. He was really in great danger. After several rounds, Big Brother Linghu's sword fell down to the floor. Luo Renjie thrust his sword out, and placed the point of his sword at Big Brother Linghu's chest and smirked, 'If you call me Grandfather of Qingcheng three times, I'll spare your life.'

"'Sure, I will! I will!' Big Brother Linghu smiled. 'After I call you that, are you going to teach me your school's famous Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing...?' Before he could even finish this sentence, Luo Renjie the villain pushed his sword forward and stabbed the sword into Big Brother Linghu's chest. The villain was so ruthless...!"

Crystal teardrops began pouring down her face. She continued her story while sobbing, "I...I...I saw what happened and rushed to stop him, but his sword had already penetrated...penetrated Big Brother Linghu's chest." Everyone in the hall fell silent.

Yu Canghai felt that all the looks directed toward him were full of disdain and anger. "Are you sure about your story?" he asked. "If, as you said, Luo Renjie had already killed Linghu Chong, how did Luo Renjie die from his sword?"

"After Big Brother Linghu was stabbed," Yilin said, "he squeezed out a smile and whispered to me, 'Little apprentice sister, I...I have an important secret to tell you. The Fortune... Fortune Prestige Escort House's Evil-Resisting...Evil-Resisting Sword Art Manuscript is at...at....' His voice became lower



and lower, and I could hardly hear him, only saw his lips moving....”

Yu Canghai was shocked at the words “Fortune Prestige Escort House’s Evil-Resisting Sword Art Manuscript.” He anxiously began to ask, “At...?” He was going to say “at which place,” but then he realized it would be very bad to ask the question in front of so many people, so he swallowed his words right away, yet his heart thumped harder and harder, hoping the young, inexperienced Yilin would say it out loud. Otherwise, when Sister Dingyi asked for details later and learned all the important connections, she would never let him know the secret.

“Luo Renjie seemed to be very concerned about that sword art manuscript,” Yilin said. “He walked closer and bent over to listen to what Big Brother Linghu was saying about the location of the sword art manuscript. Suddenly, Big Brother Linghu raised the sword he dropped on the floor, and pushed the sword into Luo Renjie’s lower abdomen. The villain fell on his back. His limbs twitched a couple of times, but he could no longer stand up. It turned out...turned out... Big Brother Linghu fooled him into coming closer, so he could kill him for revenge.”

After having finished retelling the past events, she could no longer handle the stress. She swayed back and forth a little and then fainted. Dingyi extended her arm to support her while glaring at Yu Canghai angrily.

All the listeners stayed silent and tried to imagine the epic fight in the Huiyan Wine House. Compared to masters like Priest Tian-Men, Liu Zhengfeng, Mr. Wen, He Sanqi and others, the skills of those like Linghu Chong or Luo Renjie were nothing special, but the entire event was so astounding and brutal. It was very rare for something like this to occur in the Martial World, especially when told by such a pure and pretty young nun, obviously there was no exaggeration.

“Mr. Li, you were there. So did you see the whole thing?” Liu Zhengfeng asked the Qingcheng apprentice named Li.

The Li-named apprentice did not answer, just looked at Yu Canghai. Seeing the expression on his face, all knew that the whole thing happened exactly as it was told. If Yilin had said a word that was not factual, he would have argued.

Yu Canghai turned to stare at Lao Denuo with a livid face. "Nephew apprentice Lao," he asked coldly, "What on earth did we, the Qingcheng Sword School, do that offended your respectful school so much, that your senior apprentice brother would provoke trouble over and over with the apprentices of my Qingcheng Sword School?"

"I don't know." Lao Denuo shook his head. "It seems to be a personal conflict between senior brother Linghu and apprentice brother Luo of your respectful school. It has nothing to do with the relationship between the Qingcheng Sword School and the Huashan Sword School."

Yu Canghai sneered. "Has nothing to do, indeed! You really know how to clear things up...." He hadn't even finished his words when suddenly, with a loud "crack," the west window burst open and a man flew in. Most of the people in the hall were masters and reacted quickly by dodging to the side, ready to defend themselves. Before anyone had the chance to actually take a good look at the man who had flown in, there was a second loud "crack," and another person flew in. The two men landed on the floor face down and just lay there still. Both were in long purple robes, the type of uniform worn by members of the Qingcheng Sword School. On the seat of their pants, each had the very clear imprint of a muddy foot. A husky old voice spoke loudly outside of the window tauntingly, "'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand!' Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

Without any hesitation, Yu Canghai struck a palm stance in the direction of the voice, and jumped out the window to give chase. Pushing the window frame slightly using his left hand, he jumped onto the roof. Standing there, he looked in every direction, but all he could see was the dark night sky with a shower falling down like a hanging curtain. There was

no sign of anyone. He quickly concluded that it was impossible for anyone to vanish in such a short time. Therefore, the intruder must be hiding close by. Knowing that the man must be a formidable opponent, he drew his long sword and quickly searched all around the House of Liu.

Priest Tian-Men stayed in his seat concerned about his dignity, but Sister Dingyi, He Sanqi, Mr. Wen, Liu Zhengfeng, and Lao Denuo all jumped up onto the roof. They could see the short Taoist priest running about holding a sword. The flash of his sword took the appearance of a beam of white light and flew around the dozens of houses with magnificent speed. All inwardly praised the high level of Yu Canghai's Qing-Gong skills.

Yu Canghai dashed about rapidly; none of the corners, trees, or bushes escaped his searching eyes, but he found nothing out of place. Then, he jumped back into the hall. The two apprentices were still lying on the floor. In his mind, the clear footprints on their backsides turned into hundreds of laughing faces of people in the Martial World, mocking the Qingcheng Sword School for losing face. Yu Canghai turned one apprentice over and recognized him as apprentice Shen Renjun. He didn't have to turn the other one over; the beard clearly showed that it was the one who always hung out with Shen Renjun – Ji Rentong. Yu Canghai struck the acupoints next to Shen Renjun's ribs twice, and then asked, "Who did this to you?"

Shen Renjun opened his mouth, but nothing came out of his mouth. Yu Canghai was startled. When he struck Shen Renjun, he pretended to be doing something very easy, since so many first-class masters were watching. However, he had actually used a type of Qingcheng high-level inner strength. Despite this, Shen Renjun's acupoints remained sealed, which left him no other option but to gather all his inner strength and start passing it to Shen Renjun through the Ling-Tai Acupoint on Shen's back.

After quite a while, Shen Renjun was finally able to speak in a stuttering voice, "Mast...Master!" Yu Canghai did not answer and kept passing more energy through the acupoint. "I...I did not see who it was." Shen Renjun croaked.

"How were you tricked?" Yu Canghai asked.

"Fellow apprentice Ji and I went outside to take a leak. I just felt numbness on my back, and then fell into that son of a turtle's hands." Shen Renjun said.

Yu Canghai straightened his face. "He is a first-class master. Show some respect."

"Yes, Master." Shen Renjun stammered.

Yu Canghai simply could not figure out where the enemy could possibly have come from. He raised his head and saw the indifferent face of Priest Tian-Men. It seemed that he did not care about what had happened at all. Yu Canghai thought to himself, "The members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance claim to be 'same root different branches.' Since Renjie killed Linghu Chong, it looks like even Tian-Men is blaming me for that." Suddenly he realized that the hidden enemy was most likely still in the Great Hall, so he signaled Shen Renjun to follow him and then quickly walked into the Great Hall.

People in the hall were still chatting and making wild conjectures as to who had killed the apprentice of the Taishan Sword School and the apprentice of the Qingcheng Sword School. When they saw Yu Canghai coming in, some recognized him as the Head Master of Qingcheng Sword School. For the ones who did not know him, even though all they saw was a short man, the way he walked and behaved clearly showed the dignity of a great master. So soon, they all stopped talking. Silence fell over the entire hall. Yu Canghai looked through the crowd closely, person by person. Most of the people in the hall belonged to the junior generation in the Martial World. Although he did not know many of them, by each one's apparel, he could determine which school they belonged to. He knew that no one from the junior generation

of any school could be such a master with great inner strength. If this person were really in the hall, he must look somehow different from the others. He looked and looked, one after another, when suddenly, his sharp gaze picked out a man.

This man had a very ugly face. The very muscles on his face seemed to have been twisted by some kind of evil magical force. Several pieces of plaster were spread across his face, and a big hump stood out from his back.

Yu Canghai could not contain his surprise when he suddenly thought about the man's identity. "Could it be him?" he asked himself. The 'Hunchback of the North,' Mu Gaofeng, always hung around the northern border, and seldom showed up in the central region. He had no connection with the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, so why would he show up in Liu Zhengfeng's hand-washing ceremony? But if it were not him, Yu Canghai could think of no other ugly hunchbacks in the Martial World.

The other people in the hall followed Yu Canghai's gaze and saw the hunchback. Several older members of the crowd, who knew more about the Martial World, let out cries of surprise. Liu Zhengfeng rushed toward the hunchback and greeted him, "I didn't realize that your honor had come, and did not serve you well, please pardon me."

In actuality, the hunchback was nobody famous. He was none other than the young master of the Fortune Prestige Escort House – Lin Pingzhi. Afraid of being recognized by the others, he had kept his head down the entire time and stayed in a corner of the Great Hall. If Yu Canghai had not searched very carefully, nobody would ever have noticed him. But now that everybody's eyes were fixed on him, Lin Pingzhi felt very embarrassed. He stood up immediately, bowed back to Liu Zhengfeng and said, "Not really, not really!"

Liu Zhengfeng knew that Mu Gaofeng was from the northern border region, but the man in front of him had a southern accent. He also seemed to be far too young. Despite

his doubts, he knew that Mu Gaofeng always liked to come and go like a shadow; it wouldn't be appropriate to judge his behavior using common standards. So he said very politely, "I am Liu Zhengfeng. May I have the honor to ask your respectful name?"

Lin Pingzhi never thought that someone would ask him about his name. He mumbled a couple of words but did not answer.

"You and Hero Mu...?" Liu Zhengfeng asked again.

An idea suddenly came to Lin Pingzhi's mind: "My last name is Lin. If I use only half of it, it's the character Mu."<sup>36</sup> So he said quickly, "Mu is my family name."

"Mr. Mu's coming to Hengshan has brought great honor to our Liu House. May I ask what is the relationship between you and 'Hunchback of the North,' Hero Mu?" Liu Zhengfeng inquired. He could tell that Lin Pingzhi was just a young lad, and those pieces of plaster on his face were used just to hide his true identity. He was definitely not the man who had been renowned for decades - 'Hunchback of the North' Mu Gaofeng.

Lin Pingzhi had never heard of the name 'Hunchback of the North' Mu Gaofeng before, but by the tone and voice of Liu Zhengfeng, he could tell the man named Mu had quite a reputation. Also, Yu Canghai was still glaring at him with a fierce look on his face; if he revealed his true identity, Yu Canghai would probably kill him without batting an eyelid. In such a precarious situation, the only right thing to do was to make some innocuous statements and fob them off with some vague answers. So he said, "'Hunchback of the North' Hero Mu? He is...he is a senior of mine." He thought if that man was called a hero, then of course the name "senior" would be appropriate.

Without finding anyone else suspicious, Yu Canghai had presumed this was the one who had humiliated his apprentices Shen Renjun and Ji Rentong. Even if 'Hunchback of the North' Mu Gaofeng had come himself, he would only

be cautious but not afraid. Now this one was only a child of Mu Gaofeng's family, Yu Canghai really did not take him seriously. It was this man who had first provoked the Qingcheng Sword School. There was no way that he was going to let that go easily.

"Qingcheng Sword School has never crossed paths with Mr. Mu of the north. I wonder how we have offended you?" he said coldly.

Standing face to face in front of the short priest, Lin Pingzhi remembered how his home was broken up; how his family was ruined, and his parents were taken prisoners. He didn't even know if they were still alive. And all this happened because of this short priest standing right in front of him. Although he knew the short priest's Kung Fu skills were a hundred times better than his own, he almost couldn't help drawing his weapon and lunging forward. But after all the days of hardship following his escape, he was no longer the same dandy of Fuzhou town. He took a deep breath and tried to control himself.

"Qingcheng Sword School has committed unrighteous deeds and Hero Mu happened to catch them, so of course he interferes. He is very warm-hearted and always enjoys helping the good against the evil. Why would he care if you offended him personally or not?" he replied.

Hearing these words, Liu Zhengfeng couldn't help laughing inwardly. Although 'Hunchback of the North' Mu Gaofeng had high Kung Fu skills, his moral standing was not particularly good at all. He only used the words "Hero Mu" in a very casual way. Compared to Mu Gaofeng's true character, the word "Hero" was far from a true description. This man curried favor with the powerful and never kept his promises. But he had excellent Kung Fu skills and was always alert and careful, so if one ever offended him, it would be impossible to guard against him. That was why even though people in the Martial World might be afraid of him, no one really had any respect for him. When Liu Zhengfeng heard Lin Pingzhi's

words, he truly believed that Lin was a member of Mu's family and was afraid that Yu Canghai might hurt him.

"Master Yu, Brother Mu," he said with a smile, "both of you are respectful guests in my humble place. Please, for my sake, let's drink a friendly shot of wine? Servants, wine!"

Soon, servants brought out wine.

Yu Canghai thought nothing of the young hunchback before him. But considering all the dirty and evil tricks of Mu Gaofeng he had heard before, he would rather not challenge him right away. After the wine was poured, he did not pick up the cup straightaway, instead, just waited to see what Lin Pingzhi would do.

Lin Pingzhi wavered between anger and fear, but finally anger overwhelmed him. He thought to himself, "Probably Mom and Dad have already died under the short priest's murderous hands. I'd rather die than drink with him." He glared at Yu Canghai with hatred-filled eyes and did not pick up his wine cup either. He wanted to spit out some curses, but being afraid of Yu Canghai, he remained silent.

Seeing all the hostility shown by this hunchback, Yu Canghai could not hold his temper any longer. He suddenly grabbed Lin Pingzhi by his wrist. "Alright, alright, alright! Out of respect of Master Liu, no one will cause any trouble in the Liu House. Brother Mu, let us get to know each other," he said.

Lin Pingzhi pulled his arm hard, but could not escape Yu Canghai's grip. Right after Yu spilled out his last word, a great pain shot through his wrist. He could hear his bone cracking and it seemed as though his wrist was going to be completely crushed.

Yu Canghai halted the pressure and waited for Lin Pingzhi to beg for mercy, but Lin Pingzhi hated him so much that he did not even let out a groan in spite of the wrenching pain from his wrist.

Standing by the side, Liu Zhengfeng could see big drops of sweat trickling down Lin Pingzhi's forehead, but his face



remained defiant and did not show any sign of capitulation. He admired the toughness of this young man, so he called out, "Master Yu!" and was just about to separate the two, when suddenly a high-pitched voice said, "Master Yu, why are you so eager to bully Mu Gaofeng's grandson?"

Everyone turned around to look, and saw a fat hunchback standing at the hall's entrance. He had white scars crisscrossing his face, with black spots in between, and an enormous hump on his back. He looked horribly ugly and queer. Most of the people in the hall had never seen the real face of Mu Gaofeng; now hearing this man claim to be Mu Gaofeng and seeing his bizarre appearance, all were astonished.

The hunchback had a fat body, but that did not prevent him from moving at amazing speed. People only saw a blurry shadow, and the hunchback was already standing next to Lin Pingzhi. He patted on Lin Pingzhi's shoulder. "Good lad, good lad! Bragging about your grandpa by saying things like helping the good guys against the evil and so on sounded wonderful! I really enjoyed it!" After these words, he patted Lin Pingzhi's shoulder again.

When he patted Lin's shoulder the first time, Lin Pingzhi felt a big shock going through his entire body. Yu Canghai also felt a stream of heat in his arm, and he almost had to let go of Lin Pingzhi's hand. But he immediately added more strength to his grip and held the wrist solidly.

Since the first pat did not get Lin Pingzhi out of Yu Canghai's hold, Mu Gaofeng gathered his strength while talking to Lin, and when he patted on Lin's shoulder the second time, he used more than eighty percent of his strength. Lin Pingzhi felt that for a just second, he had lost his vision, and something sweet welled up from his throat, then blood filled his mouth. He tried his best to not spill any blood and swallowed it all back down.

Yu Canghai felt burning heat under his palm; he could not hold Lin's wrist any longer and had to let go of it, taking

a step back. "This hunchback really lives up to his reputation of cruel and evil," he thought to himself. "Just to break my hold, he would inflict internal damage to his own grandson."

Lin Pingzhi gathered his strength and managed to squeeze out a laugh. "Master Yu," he said to Yu Canghai, "your Qingcheng School's skills are truly feeble. Compared to this 'Hunchback of the North' Hero Mu, you are a laggard. I suggest you submit yourself under Hero Mu and ask him to teach you a few moves, then...then...you might...improve a little...." Due to the internal injuries, he had to try hard to get these words out, feeling as though all his internal organs had been turned upside down. He finally finished his sentence, but his body had started shaking so badly that he almost fell.

"Yes!" Yu Canghai exclaimed. "Your suggestion has merit! Since you, yourself, are studying under Mr. Mu, your Kung Fu skills must be quite remarkable. I would like to check them out." By saying these particular words, Yu Canghai was basically telling everyone that his challenge was strictly for Lin Pingzhi, and that Mu Gaofeng should not interfere.

Mu Gaofeng took a few paces back and grinned. "My cute little grandson, I am afraid your skills are still too low and will be no match for the Head Master of Qingcheng Sword School. He can whack you with his first move. As your grandpa, I am overjoyed to have such a hunchbacked and also handsome grandson. I'd really hate to lose such a good kid. Why don't you kneel down and kowtow to your grandpa, then your grandpa will take him on for you. How does that sound?"

Lin Pingzhi looked at Yu Canghai and thought, "If I get into a fight with Yu recklessly, he will probably kill me with the first blow in his fury. If I can't even protect myself, how can I avenge my parents? But I, Lin Pingzhi, am a grown man, how can I call this hunchback Grandpa? It's alright if I myself am humiliated, but doing this will be a dreadful humiliation for my father as well. He would never be able to walk with his head up; how could he survive the Martial World? If I kneel down in front of this man, then I would be living under the

fame of the Hunchback of the North and never be myself again." Not able to decide, he held onto the table with his left hand and his entire body trembled slightly.

"I know you have no guts! If you want somebody else to fight for you, what's so big a deal to kowtow a couple of times?" Yu Canghai mocked. He could tell that Lin Pingzhi and Mu Gaofeng's relationship wasn't anything usual. It was obvious that Mu Gaofeng wasn't his real grandfather, otherwise, why did Lin Pingzhi only call him "Senior," but never "Grandpa?" Mu Gaofeng wouldn't be asking his own grandson to kowtow at such a moment, either. He wanted to provoke Lin Pingzhi into fighting himself, thus making things much easier to handle.

Memories flashed through Lin Pingzhi's mind, including how the Fortune Prestige Escort House was bullied and humiliated again and again by the Qingcheng Sword School. He thought to himself, "A true man will not let a small setback ruin his master plan. As long as I eventually feel pride and elation, why can't I suffer some humiliation now?" So he turned around, knelt down in front of Mu Gaofeng, and started to kowtow. "Grandpa," he said, "Yu Canghai uninhibitedly kills innocent people and robs them of their belongings. Everyone in the Martial World has the right to kill him. Would you please uphold justice and rid this evil for all the people in the Martial World?"

Lin's action was a big surprise for both Mu Gaofeng and Yu Canghai. The young hunchback acted with resolution and integrity when Yu Canghai grabbed his wrist and crushed it with his inner strength, but he was now actually willing to kowtow and beg for protection, especially in public with so many people around. Most people thought that this young hunchback was really the grandson of Mu Gaofeng; and even if he wasn't a real blood relative, he must be at least a grand-apprentice or something along those lines. Only Mu Gaofeng himself knew for certain that this man had no relationship with him whatsoever. Although Yu Canghai had an inkling

that there was something suspicious going on, he still could not determine the actual relationship between the two. All he knew was that the “Grandpa” was said in a very reluctant manner, maybe because Lin was just afraid to die.

Mu Gaofeng burst into loud laughter. “Good boy, nice lad! Why, you really want to play the game?” He praised Lin Pingzhi while staring at Yu Canghai, so the words “good boy” and “nice lad” almost seemed to be directed at Yu Canghai.

Yu Canghai was furious, but he calmed and readied himself, knowing that the fight today would not only be important to his own destiny, but also to the destiny and fame of the entire Qingcheng Sword School. He let out a smile.

“If Mr. Mu wants to present his outstanding skills in front of all our friends here, I’ll just have to play along.”

Earlier, when Mu Gaofeng patted on Lin Pingzhi’s shoulder, Yu Canghai had already learned that Mu had resourceful inner strength. And his inner strength was the explosive type; once he started the attack, it would be as overwhelming as thunder and lightning, or like landslides and tidal waves. “It is well known that this hunchback is very conceited,” he thought to himself. “If he can’t defeat me in a short time, he will become reckless and rush his attack. I’d better use all defensive moves for the first one hundred bouts. That will keep me undefeated. After one hundred moves, I will surely be able to find his weaknesses.”

Mu Gaofeng studied Yu Canghai carefully. This short priest only had the height of a youth, and probably weighed only eighty pounds, but by the way he stood, he seemed to be as stable as a mountain, well displaying the imposing manner of a great master; obviously he had well developed inner strength.

Mu Gaofeng thought to himself, “This little priest really is something. Every generation of Qingcheng Sword School has had famous people. This bull-nose priest, being the Head Master of the sword school, certainly won’t be someone easy

to deal with. I hope I won't lose this battle and let all my fame swirl down the pipe." Being a very careful person, he did not recklessly attack right away.

Right at the moment when the two were about to fight, two men flew out from the back, and with two loud thumps, landed on the floor and lay still. Both men wore purple robes, and each had a muddy footprint right on the bottom. The clear and melodious voice of a young girl shouted, "This is Qingcheng Sword School's best move, called 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand'!"

Yu Canghai was outraged. Turning around without wasting any time, he dashed toward the sound without even looking. Seeing a young girl in a green shirt standing nearby, he instantly grabbed her by the arm.

"Mom!" the girl screamed loudly and then burst into tears.

Yu Canghai was startled. After hearing the embarrassing words, he acted in great anger without thinking. He had thought that she must have been involved with what had happened to the two Qingcheng apprentices, so he grabbed her arm at full strength. When he heard the girl's scream, he realized he had made a terrible mistake. This was just a little girl. How could he have used such power against her? In front of so many people, such behavior really did not fit with his image as the Head Master of Qingcheng Sword School. He quickly let go of her arm, yet the girl cried louder and louder.

"You broke my arm. Mom, my arm is broken! Waah, it hurts! It hurts!" The girl cried.

Head Master Yu of the Qingcheng Sword School had fought many fights and overcome many difficulties, but this was the first time he had been placed in such an embarrassing situation. Being stared at by hundreds of accusing eyes, he felt his face burn with shame, and he did not even know where to put his arms and feet.

"Don't cry! Don't cry!" he whispered to the girl. "Your arm is not broken. It won't break."

“It’s broken already. Why are you bullying me? A grownup beats up a kid, shame on you! Waah, it hurts! Waah...!” she cried.

The young girl was about thirteen or fourteen years of age. She had a green blouse on. With skin as white as milk and a pretty little face, she looked adorable. The crowd in the hall all felt sympathy for her. A couple of the rougher members had already started shouting out, “Beat the bull-nose up!” “Kill the short priest!”

Yu Canghai was very embarrassed. He knew he had incurred the public wrath, so he dared not to say anything, and just said to the girl, “Little sister, don’t cry. I am sorry. Let me look at your arm, see if it hurts.” He wanted to roll her sleeves up, but the girl screamed, “No, no! Don’t touch me! Mom, Mom, the short priest broke my arm.”

While Yu Canghai was completely lost, a man in a purple robe walked out from the crowd. It was none other than Fang Renzhi, the most cunning apprentice of the Qingcheng Sword School. “Hey, little girl, you’re just pretending now!” he said. “My Master’s hand did not even touch your sleeve, so how could he have broken your arm?”

“Mom, another one is coming to hurt me!” the girl shouted.

Having watched everything angrily from the side, Sister Dingyi stepped forward and tried to slap Fang Renzhi’s face. “Big bullying the small, shame on you!” she yelled. Fang Renzhi tried to block with his arm, but Dingyi extended her right arm quickly and grabbed his hand, and then pushed down on his elbow with her left arm. If she gave a solid push, Fang Renzhi’s arm would be broken instantly. Yu Canghai poked his finger at Dingyi’s back. Dingyi had to let go of Fang Renzhi and strike back with her hand. Yu Canghai didn’t want to fight with her, so he jumped back two steps and said, “Excuse me!”

Dingyi held the little girl’s hand and asked gently, “Good child, where does it hurt? Let me have a look. I’ll heal it for

you.” She felt the girl’s arm but did not find any broken bones. That helped her relax a little. She rolled the girl’s sleeve up. On the lovely white arm, four clear black finger marks could be easily seen. Dingyi’s anger exploded.

“You liar!” she shouted at Fang Renzhi. “If your Master did not touch her arm at all, then who left the four black marks?”

“It was the turtle! It was the turtle!” the little girl said, pointing at Yu Canghai’s back as she spoke.

Suddenly, everybody burst into loud laughter, and some even spit out the tea from their mouths; some laughed till they doubled over. Laughter filled the entire hall. Yu Canghai had no idea why everybody was laughing so hard. He thought that the little girl had called him a turtle just like any kid would have after they got upset. What was so funny about that? But seeing everyone laughing at him, he still felt quite embarrassed.

Fang Renzhi jumped forward and peeled a piece of paper off Yu Canghai’s robe, then crumpled the paper into a ball. Yu Canghai took the paper ball and opened it, then saw a picture of a big turtle on the sheet. Embarrassed and anguished, Yu Canghai suddenly realized that it must have been a set up. The picture of the turtle was drawn ahead of time of course. It must have been the girl who cried and screamed to divert his attention, and then stuck the paper onto his back. It would be impossible for anybody else to play such a trick behind his back. If that was the case, then there must have been adults behind the scene. He turned around and glanced at Liu Zhengfeng, thinking, “This girl must be a member of the Liu household, so it was Liu Zhengfeng who played all these tricks on me.”

Liu Zhengfeng saw the glance from Yu Canghai and immediately understood that Yu had placed the blame on him. He took a step forward.

“Little sister, where are you from? Where are your mom and dad?” he asked the little girl.

By asking these words, he wanted to first assure Yu Canghai that he had no clue as to what was going on, and also, he had become suspicious himself and wanted to know who had brought this little girl here.

“My mom and dad went away for something else,” the little girl muttered. “They told me to sit here and not go anywhere. They said that later there would be a good show; two guys would fly out and then lie still. They said this is the Qingcheng Sword School’s best move called ‘Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand.’ It was a good show indeed!”

She clapped her hands. The crystal teardrops on her cheeks had not yet dried out, but she was already smiling quite happily. No one could help but laugh at these words. These words were undoubtedly said to humiliate the Qingcheng Sword School. The two Qingcheng apprentices were still lying on the ground with their bottoms up, and each had a clear footprint on it. Qingcheng Sword School had really lost all face.

Yu Canghai struck one apprentice’s back, only to find that both apprentices had their acupoints sealed in exactly the same manner as Shen Renjun and Ji Rentong earlier. To unseal their acupoints would require quite some inner strength and quite some time. Now, not only was Mu Gaofeng staring at him fiercely, but another tough opponent was hiding close by; the smart thing to do would be not to waste any of his inner strength on unsealing the apprentices’ acupoints.

“Carry them out,” he whispered to Fang Renzhi. Fang Renzhi waved at several Qingcheng apprentices, who rushed out and carried the two out of the hall.

Out of the blue, the little girl said loudly, “Qingcheng Sword School really has a lot of people! One ‘Geese Landing in Sand’ takes two to carry. Two ‘Geese Landing in Sand’ takes four to carry.”

Yu Canghai’s face turned livid with rage. “What’s your dad’s name?” he asked the little girl with a long face. “Did he



teach you these words?"

He figured that since those words were really sarcastic, if it wasn't her parents who had taught her, she would never have said them at such a young and tender age. He then thought, "The name 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand' was made up by Linghu Chong; could it be that Huashan Sword School blames Renjie for killing Linghu Chong, and now wants to get even with the Qingcheng Sword School? The one who had sealed the acupoints had very high skills; could it be...could it be that the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, Yue Buqun, was playing tricks behind the scene?" When he thought that Yue Buqun had plotted against him, he couldn't help thinking, "That man's Kung Fu skills are outstanding. And since the five sword schools are united under the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, if they all start to attack, the Qingcheng Sword School would suffer a crushing defeat." At these thoughts, his face whitened with worry.

The little girl ignored Yu Canghai's question. Smiling merrily, she started reciting, "One times two is two; two times two is four; three times two is six; four times two is eight; five times two is ten...."

"I am asking you a question!" Yu Canghai yelled in a stern voice.

Her mouth twitching, the little girl started crying again while hiding her face in Sister Dingyi's arms. Dingyi patted her on the back gently and comforted her.

"Don't be scared. Don't be afraid! Good child, don't be scared." She turned to Yu Canghai. "Why are you scaring a kid like that?"

Yu Canghai let out a disgruntled snort. "So the Five Mountains Sword Alliance is against my Qingcheng Sword School now. I'd better be very careful," he thought to himself.

The little girl stuck her head out from under Dingyi's arms and grinned. "Granny, two times two is four; two of the Qingcheng Sword School 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in

Sand' will take four to carry. Three times two is six. Three 'Bum Bum Back, Geese Landing in Sand' will take six to carry. Four times two is eight...." She did not continue, but starting giggling.

Such behavior in suddenly going from crying to all of a sudden smiling was more appropriate for a seven or eight year old child. Judging by her height, the girl looked to be thirteen or fourteen. Every word from her was designed to humiliate Yu Canghai somehow; people all thought those were definitely not the words from an innocent and sincere child; there was no doubt that someone must have been behind it all.

"A true man acts openly and aboveboard. Whichever friend wants to be hard on me, better show yourself. What kind of a hero are you if you only hide, sneak around, and direct a little child to utter such nonsense?" Yu Canghai bellowed loudly. Although he was short, the words were spoken using inner strength all the way down from his abdomen and echoed in everyone's ears. People were shocked by the great energy Yu had put on display and stopped belittling him. The entire hall quieted down, and nobody answered.

After a while, the little girl suddenly spoke again. "Granny, he asked what kind of hero that was. Are the people of the Qingcheng Sword School heroes?"

Dingyi was a senior sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School. Although she was displeased with the Qingcheng Sword School, she wouldn't just defame the entire school in public, so she answered vaguely, "The Qingcheng Sword School...the Qingcheng Sword School had many heroes in the last generation."

"Then how about now? Are there any left?" The girl asked again.

Dingyi pouted her lips at Yu Canghai. "Why don't you ask the Head Master Priest of the Qingcheng Sword School?" she said.

“Head Master Priest of the Qingcheng Sword School,” the girl said, “if someone was badly wounded and could not even move, then someone else came to bully him, is the second person who took advantage of the other’s precarious position a hero?”

Yu Canghai was shocked. “She is indeed from the Huashan Sword School!” he thought secretly.

People who had listened to Yilin recount the story of Luo Renjie killing Linghu Chong all felt a shock too. “Could this little girl be somebody related to the Huashan Sword School?”

Lao Denuo thought, “These words from the little girl are really all for defending Big Apprentice Brother against injustice. Who is she?” Afraid to upset the Little Apprentice Sister, he hadn’t been in a hurry to inform his fellow apprentices about the death of Big Apprentice Brother.

Yilin’s entire body started to tremble. She felt grateful toward the little girl. She had always wanted to ask Yu Canghai the same question, but being a gentle and kind girl who always respected the elders and seniors, she simply could not confront Yu Canghai, a senior. Now that the little girl had spoken them out for her, teardrops started to run down her cheeks.

“Who taught you to ask this?” Yu Canghai asked, lowering his voice.

The young girl ignored his question once again. “There was a guy named Luo Renjie. He was your apprentice, wasn’t he? When he saw someone badly wounded, and the badly wounded man was a very good person, not only didn’t he help him, he stabbed him with his sword. Was that Luo Renjie a true hero? Was that the kind of Qingcheng Sword School’s chivalrous virtue you taught him?”

These words were only coming out of the mouth of a little girl, but they were stated so clearly and logically, it was really overwhelming.

Yu Canghai did not know how to answer, so he asked sternly, "Who on earth is telling you to ask these questions of me? Is your father from the Huashan Sword School?"

The little girl turned around to ask Dingyi, "Granny, is his scaring a little girl the kind of deed from a proper hero or a true man?"

Dingyi sighed. "That, I don't know."

People in the hall became more and more surprised. Those words the little girl said before were probably taught by grownups, but the two questions she just asked were really her own response, elicited from the manner of Yu Canghai's questioning. They showed clear criticism and were right to the point. How could one have expected her to be so sharp at such a young age?

Looking at the little girl through her blurring eyes, Yilin saw her slim back. Suddenly she realized, "I have seen this little sister before. Where have I seen her?" She thought for a while and then remembered. "Yes, she was also at the Huiyan Wine House yesterday." All the scenes from the previous day suddenly ran through her mind and became clearer and clearer.

The previous morning, when she was forced into Huiyan Wine House, there were many people sitting around seven or eight tables. Then the two from the Taishan Sword School challenged Tian Boguang and Tian Boguang killed one of them. By then most of the customers had been scared away, and the waiter dared not serve anyone anymore. But in the corner close to the street, a big, tall monk continued to sit by a small table. There were also two more people sitting at another small table. Throughout the time until Linghu Chong was killed, and she carried his body downstairs from the wine house, the monk and the other two never left. At that time, she was scared to death; with lots of things going through her mind, she simply did not care much about the giant monk and the other two. Now seeing the back view of the little girl and comparing it with the scene in her mind, she

could clearly remember that the little girl was one of the two sitting by the small table in the wine house. She had her back to her at that time, so she only remembered her appearance from the rear. And she was wearing a yellow blouse then, not the green blouse she had on now. If the little girl had not turned around, she would never have remembered her.

But who was the other one? She could only remember that it was a man for sure. But was he old or young, and what kind of clothes was he dressed in? She could not remember anything. Also, she remembered seeing the monk pick up his bowl to drink his wine, and when Tian Boguang was tricked into admitting his failure, the monk had laughed loudly. The little girl was laughing too; her clear laughter seemed to be ringing in her ears again. It was surely her! Who was that giant monk? Why was a monk drinking wine?

Yilin was immersed in the memories of the previous day's scenes. It seemed as though Linghu Chong's smiling face had appeared in front of her eyes again: how he had tricked Luo Renjie into coming closer before his death; how he thrust his sword into the enemy's belly; how she carried Linghu Chong's body staggering down the stairs empty-minded, not knowing where she had been; how she absent-mindedly went out of the town gate and just walked about aimlessly.... She could feel the body in her arms getting colder and colder. She didn't feel his weight, didn't feel sad, nor know where she was going. Then, she came by a lotus pond where the lotus flowers were so bright and so beautiful. Then, her chest seemed as if it was struck by a big hammer, and she could not hold out any longer. She fell down together with Linghu Chong's body, and then passed out.

When she slowly regained consciousness, she felt bright sunshine blinding her eyes. She tried holding on to the body but missed. Jumping up in surprise, she found herself still by the lotus pond, with the beautiful lotus flowers just as before, but there was no sign of Linghu Chong's body. She was so

panic-stricken that she rushed around the lotus pond several times, but still couldn't find any sign of where the body had gone. Seeing the bloodstains on her clothes, she knew it couldn't have been a bad dream. She almost passed out again, but she forced herself to calm down a little, and then searched around one more time. Still, the body seemed to have flown away on wings without a trace. The water in the lotus pond was quite shallow. She waded into the water and searched around; still, there wasn't a single trace. Then, she went back to Hengshan Town, asked for the location of the Liu House, and found her Master. But during all this time, she had been pondering, "Where did Big Brother Linghu's body go? Maybe someone passing by took it? Maybe it was dragged away by wild animals?" When she thought that he had lost his life saving her, but she couldn't even take good care of his body, she felt miserable. If the body really had been dragged away by wild animals and had already been eaten, she would kill herself. Actually, even if Linghu Chong's body were fine, she would rather not live anyway.

Suddenly, from deep within her heart, another thought popped up. That was a thought she had never dared to think about. The thought had come to her several times through the day, but each time she immediately pushed it back and only thought, "How could I be so disturbed? How could I be thinking such nonsense? This is just absurd! No, it's not like that!" But now, she could not hide it any longer, and it appeared clearly in her mind: "When I carried Big Brother Linghu's body, I felt very calm and peaceful. I was actually feeling a bit happy, just like when I exercise chanting the Buddhist Scriptures with an empty mind. I seemed to have hoped to just hold his body and walk casually on a never-ending road that nobody else was on. I would pay any price to find his body. Why? Am I not able to bear the thought that wild animals ate his body? No! Not that at all! I just want to carry his body and walk around aimlessly, or just sit by the lotus pond quietly. Why did I faint? Oh, no, I am terrible! I

should not be thinking like this. Master wouldn't allow it, and Buddha wouldn't tolerate it either. These are evil thoughts. I shouldn't be trapped by evil thoughts. But where is Big Brother Linghu's body?" Her mind was in such chaos. She could almost see the smile on Linghu Chong's lips once again. It was such a carefree smile. Then it changed into a disdainful look on his face when he swore, "You are bad luck, little nun!" She felt a pain from her chest like a knife cutting into her flesh....

Yu Canghai's voice rose again. "Lao Denuo, this little girl is from your Huashan Sword School, isn't she?"

"No. This is the first time I have seen this little sister. She is not from our sword school," Lao Denuo denied in a hurry.

"Sure. If you don't want to admit it, fine!" Yu Canghai did not believe him at all.

Suddenly Yu Canghai waved his hand. With a flash, an awl-shaped missile shot toward Yilin. "Little Sister, see what this is?" he yelled.

Yilin was still deep in her thoughts, and had never expected a projectile from Yu Canghai. She actually felt some kind of joy: "It is a relief that he is killing me. I don't feel like living anyway!" Seeing the missile flying closer, and hearing several people shouting, "Look out for that projectile!" she still had no intention of dodging it. For some unknown reason, she felt unspeakable peace and joy, feeling that there was only sadness and endless loneliness in the living world. She would be very happy if the missile killed her.

Dingyi gently pushed the little girl aside and dashed in front of Yilin to block the missile. Although she had the look of an old Granny, the dash was extremely fast. The missile wasn't traveling that fast, but it was still a shooting projectile. Dingyi started later yet arrived earlier, and was able to get ready to catch the projectile. Just when it seemed that Sister Dingyi would catch the projectile without too much effort, the missile suddenly dropped to the floor about two feet away from her. Since Dingyi had already extended

her arm to catch it, yet missed, it was like losing a bout in front of everyone. Her face turned slightly red.

Yu Canghai immediately waved his hand again and threw the paper ball toward the little girl's face. The paper ball was made out of the paper with the turtle picture.

"So the bull-nose shot the missile just to lure me away. He wasn't really trying to hurt Yilin," Dingyi thought to herself.

The small paper ball went much faster, and carried much more strength than the awl-shaped missile. Yu Canghai had used his inner strength when he threw the paper ball. If it hit the little girl's face, she would definitely get hurt.

Dingyi was standing next to Yilin. When she realized what had happened, it was already too late to help. All she could do was yelling, "You...!"

The little girl swiftly sat down on the floor and cried, "Mom, Mom, he wants to kill me." She moved very swiftly, and dodged the paper ball in perfect timing. Anyone could tell that she knew martial arts, but just acted like a spoiled child. Everyone thought it was quite funny. Yu Canghai also felt that it wouldn't be appropriate to push her any more. He had a belly full of suspicions, but none of his questions could be answered.

Seeing the embarrassed expression on Yu Canghai's face, Sister Dingyi couldn't help laughing inwardly. Since the Qingcheng Sword School had lost face so badly, she didn't want to mess with him anymore, so she said to Yilin, "Yilin, I don't know where the little sister's parents went. Why don't you go with her to look for them, so she won't be bullied because nobody is looking out for her?"

"Yes, Master!" Yilin answered. She walked up to the little girl and took her hand. The girl smiled at her, and they walked out of the hall together.

Yu Canghai sneered and stopped paying any more attention to the girl. He turned around and stared at Mu Gaofeng.





# **Chapter 5: Healing**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Linghu Chong slowly closed his eyes. His breathing gradually slowed down and soon he fell asleep. Yilin stayed by Linghu Chong's side, and gently whisked a leafy branch to drive away mosquitoes and other bugs for him**

Yilin followed the girl outside. "What's your name?" she asked.

The girl gave a sly grin. "My last name is Linghu and my first name is Chong!"

Yilin's heart thumped. "I asked you politely, why are you making fun of me?" She pulled a long face.

"What makes you think I'm making fun of you?" The girl kept grinning. "Do you think your friend is the only one who is called Linghu Chong?"

Yilin felt deep sorrow in her heart. She sighed and could no longer hold back her tears. "Big Brother Linghu was my savior," she said. "His death was my fault, I...I am not worthy to be his friend."

Just then, in the hallway outside, two hunchbacks hurried by. Yilin recognized them as the Hunchback of the North Mu Gaofeng, and Lin Pingzhi. The girl giggled.

"What are the odds! An old, ugly hunchback, together with a young, ugly hunchback."

Yilin was a bit annoyed by the girl's remarks. "Girl," she asked, "is it possible for you to find your mother and father by yourself? My head is beginning to hurt, and I'm not feeling very well right now."

The girl grinned. "I know you're faking a headache. You're just mad because I used Linghu Chong's name. My dear sis, your Master asked you to take care of me; are you abandoning me already? If some rascals pick on me again, your Master's going to blame you for sure!"

"You are much more capable than I am, and you're very smart too. Even the renowned Master Yu didn't know what to do with you. People are all thanking Buddha that you aren't

the one picking on others. Who would dare bully you?" Yilin countered.

The girl burst into laughter. She held Yilin's hand and said, "Now you're the one making fun of me. If it weren't for your Master, that bull-nose would've beaten me up. Sis, my name is Qu Feiyan. My grandpa calls me Feifei; you can call me Feifei too."

Yilin felt a little better when the girl revealed her real name. But she also thought it was strange that the girl knew she was still thinking about Linghu Chong, and used his name to startle her. Maybe the clever and eccentric girl had hidden outside the window and overheard her report to all the masters. "Well," she said, "Miss Qu, let's go find your mother and father then. Where do you think they might be?"

"I know where they went," Qu Feiyan said. "If you want to look for them, you can go by yourself. I'm not going."

"Why don't you want to go?" Yilin asked in surprise.

"I am still too young; of course I don't want to go. But you're different, you're so gloomy and depressed right now, maybe you'd prefer to go there early," Qu Feiyan said.

Yilin's heart thumped. "You mean your mother and father...."

"My parents were murdered by bad guys a long time ago. If you want to look for them, you'll have to go to the underworld."

Yilin was very vexed. "If your parents have passed away already, how can you still make fun of them? I am leaving!"

Qu Feiyan grabbed onto Yilin's left hand and started to beg, "My dear sis, I don't have anyone else. I'm always so lonely. Nobody plays with me. Please, please just stay a little bit longer!"

Yilin was moved by her words. "Well, alright," she sighed, "I'll stay with you a little longer. But you have to stop saying such nonsense. Also, I am a member of the Buddhist order, so it isn't appropriate for you to call me sis."

Qu Feiyan laughed. "You think I was just saying silly words, but I think they make perfect sense. Different people have different perspectives. You are older than me, so I should call you sis. What's wrong with that? Sis Yilin! Why don't you quit being a nun?"

Yilin was startled, and stepped back.

Qu Feiyan let go of her hand. "What's so great about being a nun?" she asked. "You can't eat fish, shrimp, chicken or duck, not to mention beef or lamb. Sis, you're really very pretty. You don't look so good right now because you shaved your head,<sup>37</sup> but once you grow a nice long head of beautiful hair back, you'll be a real babe!"

Yilin could tell that Qu Feiyan was speaking from her heart, so she smiled. "I am already a member of the Buddhist clergy. We believe in the doctrine of the Four Emptiness; why would I care whether my outer husk is beautiful or ugly?"

Qu Feiyan turned her head toward Yilin and looked at Yilin's face carefully. It had just stopped raining, and dark clouds started drifting away slowly. Moonlight streamed through the opening at an angle and illuminated Yilin's face with a pale silver glow, which made her face even more beautiful. Qu Feiyan gave a sigh.

"Sis, you are so beautiful," she said slowly, "no wonder he thinks about you so much."

Yilin's face became flushed. "What are you talking about?" she exclaimed uncomfortably. "If you keep making fun of me, I am going to leave."

"Alright! I'll stop," Qu Feiyan said with a smile. "Sis, can you give me some 'Heavenly Connecting Glue?' I need to save someone."

"Who are you saving?" Yilin asked in surprise.

"He's a very important person, but I can't tell you who he is yet." Qu Feiyan grinned.

"I really should give you the medicine if you need it to save somebody's life," Yilin said, "but my Master told us that the making of the 'Heavenly Connecting Glue' is not easy,

and we have been ordered not to use it if the wounded person is unworthy.”

“Sis,” Qu Feiyan said, “if somebody cursed your Master and your Heng-Shan Sword School, would he be worthy or unworthy?”

“If he cursed my Master and our Heng-Shan Sword School, of course he would be unworthy, how could he be any good?”

“That’s really very interesting,” Qu Feiyan mused slyly. “There’s this guy who once said again and again that he would have really bad luck after seeing nuns, and would lose all his bets. He abused you, your Master, and the entire Heng-Shan Sword School. If such an unworthy fellow got wounded....”

Before she even finished speaking, Yilin had already turned around and stridden away angrily. Qu Feiyan jumped in front of her, arms outstretched and blocking Yilin’s way. She kept smiling but had no intention of letting Yilin pass.

A thought suddenly struck Yilin. “Yesterday at the Huiyan Wine House, this girl sat with a man throughout the entire incident, until Big Brother Linghu was murdered. When I carried his body down the stairs, she was still sitting there. She must have seen the whole thing; there’s no need for her to eavesdrop on what I said at all. Could she have followed me all the way?” She wanted to ask the girl an important question, but could not make herself speak the words. Yilin could only blush with embarrassment.

“Sis, I know you want to ask me, ‘Where did Big Brother Linghu’s body go?’ Am I right?” Qu Feiyan grinned.

“Yes, would you please tell me? I...I would really appreciate it!” Yilin pleaded.

“I don’t know, but there’s someone who does. However, he’s badly wounded and could die any minute now. If you can save him using the ‘Heavenly Connecting Glue,’ he might be able to tell you where Big Brother Linghu’s body is.”

“You don’t know yourself?” Yilin asked.

"If I, Qu Feiyan, know where Linghu Chong's dead body is, may Heaven let me die a terrible death by Yu Canghai's sword tomorrow!"

"I believe you. You don't have to vow," Yilin said hurriedly. "So who is this person?"

"It's up to you if you want to save his life or not. And the place we're going to isn't such a good place either."

In order to find Linghu Chong's body, even a hill of knives or a forest of swords would not stop Yilin from going, much less something like "not a good place." Yilin nodded, "Let's go," and they marched towards the gate.

It was still raining outside. There were some oilpaper-umbrellas propped against the wall beside the gate. Yilin and Qu Feiyan each took one and walked out towards the northeast corner of the city. It was already late at night, and there was hardly anybody in the street. When they walked by, a couple of dogs in the deep alleys barked at them. All Yilin could think about was where to find Linghu Chong's body, so even though Qu Feiyan led her through many remote little streets, she did not care. After they walked for quite a while, Qu Feiyan entered a very narrow alley. A small red lantern stuck out from a door on the left side of the street. Qu Feiyan knocked on the door three times. Someone approached from the courtyard within, opened the door, and stuck his head out. Qu Feiyan whispered something in the man's ear and stuck something into his hands.

"Sure, sure! Come in please, Misses!" the man said.

Qu Feiyan turned back and motioned to Yilin, who followed her through the doorway. The man had a surprised look on his face upon seeing Yilin, but still hurried ahead to lead the way. After they walked through the courtyard, they arrived at a room in the east side of the building. The man parted the curtain door.

"Miss, Sister, through here please," he said.

The scent of perfume filled the entire room. Yilin walked in and saw a huge bed in the room. Exotic silk quilts and



pillows covered the bed. They were decorated with Xiang<sup>38</sup> Embroidery, one of the greatest arts of its type in the world. A pair of love birds playing in the water was embroidered on the cover of the red silk quilt. It was made with very bright colors and the ducks seemed very lifelike. Yilin had been cloistered in the White-Cloud Nunnery since she was very little. The quilt she used was very simple, made with gray cloth. She had never seen such a gorgeous bed set in her entire life. She glanced at it, and immediately turned her head away. A big red candle was placed on the small table next to the bed; a mirror and a makeup box sat neatly by the red candle; two pairs of exotic slippers lay on the floor side by side near the bed – a pair for a man and a pair for a woman. Yilin felt a sudden shock when she raised her head and saw a shy face, red with embarrassment, and looking surprised. Then she realized that it was only her own reflection in the mirror.

The sound of footsteps came from behind them. What appeared to be a maid walked in with a big smile and began serving tea. She wore very tight clothes and she behaved quite coquettishly.

Yilin felt more and more uneasy. “What is this place?” she whispered to Qu Feiyan.

Qu Feiyan grinned and then whispered something to the maid.

“Sure!” The woman covered up the smile on her lips with her hand and walked out slowly.

“That woman is bumbling! She can’t be very honest!” Yilin thought to herself.

“Why did you bring me here? What is this place?” she asked Qu Feiyan again.

“This is a very famous spot in the town of Hengshan. It’s called the Jade House,” Qu Feiyan said with a broad grin.

“What is this Jade House?”

“The Jade House is the best brothel in town.”

When Yilin heard the word “brothel,” her heart skipped a beat, and she almost fainted. When she saw the way the room was decorated, she already had a feeling that something was not quite right, but she did not expect to be in a brothel at all. Although she did not really understand what a brothel was, she had heard from the secular apprentice-sisters that prostitutes were the most lewd of women; they would consort with any man who had enough money.

“Did Qu Feiyan bring me here to be one of them?” She was so shocked and worried that she almost burst into tears.

A man’s loud laughter exploded from the room next door. The voice sounded very familiar, and before long, Yilin recognized it as the voice of the villain, “Ten Thousand Miles Loner” Tian Boguang. Yilin’s legs gave out on her; she collapsed into a chair, her face frightened and pale.

“What’s wrong?” Qu Feiyan was startled and rushed over to check on her.

“It’s Tian...Tian Boguang!” Yilin whispered.

“That’s right, I recognized his voice too. It’s your cute little apprentice Tian Boguang.” Qu Feiyan grinned.

“Who’s saying my name?” Tian Boguang shouted loudly from the next room.

“Hey, Tian Boguang,” Qu Feiyan yelled, “your Master’s here. Come here quickly and kowtow to your Master!”

Tian Boguang became enraged. “What Master, you little bitch? You’re just babbling. Keep at it, and I’m going to bust open your stinking mouth.”

“Isn’t it true that you swore to take little sister Yilin of the Heng-Shan Sword School as your Master at the Huiyan Wine House? She is right here. Hurry up, and get over here!” Qu Feiyan urged.

“How could she *possibly* be in a place like this?” Tian Boguang exclaimed. “Huh, how...how did you know? Who are you? I am going to kill you!” A trace of fear could actually be heard in his blustering voice.

"Come here and kowtow to your Master first," Qu Feiyan said airily.

"No, no! Don't let him come over!" Yilin hurriedly objected.

Tian Boguang let out a cry in shock, and then came a loud "thump," as he apparently jumped to the floor from his bed.

"Sir! What are you doing?" a woman's voice inquired.

"Tian Boguang," Qu Feiyan shouted, "don't you run away! Your Master's here to settle a score with you."

"What damn master or apprentice?" Tian Boguang retorted. "I was tricked by that Linghu Chong! If that little nun comes one step closer, I'll kill her in a blink!"

"Fine! I am not going over. And you don't come here either!" Yilin said in a trembling voice.

"Tian Boguang," Qu Feiyan yelled, "you're supposed to be a somebody in the Martial World, why don't you be a man? Are you backing out of your promise? Come over here and kowtow to your Master!"

Tian Boguang snorted, but did not say another word.

"I don't want him to kowtow; I don't want to see him either. He...he is not my apprentice," Yilin said.

Tian Boguang jumped in immediately, "See! The little Sister doesn't want to see me at all!"

"Fine," Qu Feiyan said, "have it your way, but when we came here earlier, we were followed by a couple of little sneaks. You'd better go and get rid of them fast. Your master and I are resting here. You can keep guard outside, and keep people from bothering us. If you do your job well, then maybe I won't mention your agreeing to be the little Sister's apprentice to anyone. Otherwise, I'll just announce it to the entire world!"

Tian Boguang raised his voice and gave a sudden shout, "You sneaking little punks, you've got a lot of nerve!"

A window opened with a bang, followed by the clang of two weapons falling atop the roof; then someone screamed in

pain, while the footsteps of someone else running away could be heard. Again came the sound of a window opening with a bang as Tian Boguang leaped down the roof back to his room.

"Killed one, a little skulker from the Qingcheng Sword School. The other one ran away," he declared.

"You're hopeless! How could you let one get away?" Qu Feiyan complained.

"I couldn't kill that one," Tian Boguang explained hurriedly. "She...she was a nun of the Heng-Shan Sword School."

"So it was your Uncle-Master! Of course you couldn't kill her." Qu Feiyan giggled.

Yilin was astonished. She murmured, "Was that my apprentice sister? What do I do now?"

"Hey, little girl, what's your name?" Tian Boguang asked.

Grinning, Qu Feiyan said, "You shouldn't ask questions like that. If you keep your mouth shut, your Master will put the business of settling her score on hold for now."

Tian Boguang shut up immediately.

"Qu, let's leave here quickly!" Yilin said urgently.

"But you haven't seen the patient yet," Qu Feiyan insisted. "Didn't you have something to ask him? But if you're afraid of making your Master unhappy, and want to go back, that's fine with me."

"Well, I am already here anyway, let's...let's go see him," Yilin said after thinking for a moment.

Qu Feiyan smiled and walked toward the side of the bed. She pushed the wall on the east side of the room, and a secret door opened silently. Qu Feiyan waved at Yilin, motioning her to follow, and then walked through the door. Yilin felt that the whole business with the brothel was getting more and more mysterious. Thank Heavens that Tian Boguang was in the room on the west side. She figured the further she was from him the better, so she gathered her strength and followed Qu in. There was another room inside,

but no light. With the illumination from outside, she could tell it was a small room. There was also a bed in it, shrouded by a curtain. She could vaguely see that somebody was lying on the bed behind the curtain. Yilin stopped at the secret door but was afraid to go in.

“Sis, go ahead, help him with your ‘Heavenly Connecting Glue’!” Qu Feiyan directed.

“He...he really knows where Big Brother Linghu’s body is?” Yilin asked in hesitation.

“Maybe he does, maybe he doesn’t. I don’t know.”

“But you said earlier that he did know.” Yilin was frustrated.

“I’m not a gentleman; I don’t have to keep my words. If you want to help him, get to work, otherwise, just turn around and leave. Nobody’s going to stop you,” Qu Feiyan snapped.

“No matter what the cost is, I need to find Big Brother Linghu’s body even if there is only a slim chance, I can’t let it pass,” Yilin thought to herself. “Alright, I will work on him,” she declared.

She went back to the main room to get the candle, and then walked back into the small room and stopped beside the bed. She opened the curtain and saw a man lying on the bed. A green handkerchief covered his face. When he breathed in and out, the cloth moved as well. Not being able to see his face actually gave Yilin a bit of comfort.

“Where is he wounded?” she turned and asked.

“His chest. The wound is very deep; it barely missed his heart,” Qu Feiyan answered.

Yilin gently lifted the thin blanket covering his chest. A large wound could be seen right in the middle of his bare chest. It had stopped bleeding, but since the gash was so deep, the man was still in critical condition. Yilin calmed herself a little and thought, “No matter what it takes, I have to save his life.” She passed the candle to Qu Feiyan, and took the wooden box containing the “Heavenly Connecting

Glue” out of her pocket. After opening the box, she put it on the table at the side of the bed and then gently pressed down around the edge of the wound.

“All the acupoints that help to stop bleeding have already been sealed. Otherwise he would be dead by now,” Qu Feiyan said in a low voice.

Yilin nodded. All the acupoints around the wound had already been properly sealed, and was done much better than what she could have achieved by herself. She slowly removed the cotton padding that covered the wound. Once the padding was removed, blood gushed out. Yilin had learned how to treat wounds from her seniors. She pressed down on the wound with her left hand, and applied the “Heavenly Connecting Glue” to the wound with her right hand. When she finished, she immediately put the cotton padding back onto the wound. “Heavenly Connecting Glue” was the Heng-Shan Sword School’s treasured poultice, prepared from a secret recipe. Once applied to wounds, it would stop the bleeding in short order. Yilin could hear the man breathing heavily. She wasn’t sure if he would survive, so she couldn’t resist but to ask the question.

“Sir, I have something to ask you, please give me an answer.”

Suddenly, Qu Feiyan tilted her body to the side. The candlestick tilted to the side as well, and the flame suddenly went out. Darkness swept the entire room.

“Oops!” Qu Feiyan let out a cry. “The light went out.”

It was so dark in the room that Yilin could not even see her own fingers. She became quite flustered. “How can a member of the Buddhist order remain in such an unsavory place? I need to leave here as soon as I find out where Big Brother Linghu’s body is,” she thought. With a trembling voice, she asked.

“Sir, are you feeling a little better now?”

The man let out a groan but did not answer her question.

“He’s running a fever. Feel his forehead, it’s burning hot!” Qu Feiyan exclaimed.

Before Yilin even had a chance to answer, her right hand was already caught by Qu Feiyan and placed on top of the man’s forehead. Apparently, Qu Feiyan had removed the green handkerchief that covered the man’s face earlier. Yilin felt as if her fingers were touching burning coal; she couldn’t help but feel pity for him.

“I also have medicine to take orally. I’d better administer it,” she said. “Qu, will you please light the candle?”

“Sure, you wait here. I’ll go find some flints.”

Hearing that Feiyan was leaving, Yilin became very nervous. She grabbed onto Feiyan’s sleeve.

“No, no, don’t leave. What am I suppose to do here alone?”

Qu Feiyan let out a small laugh. “Go ahead and take out the medicine,” she said.

Yilin took out a bottle from her pocket, opened the bottle and dumped three pills out onto her palm. “I have the pills. You give them to him,” she said.

“Better not drop the pills in the dark. This concerns somebody’s life; it’s no joke. Sis, if you are afraid to be left here alone, then I’ll stay here, you go find the flints,” Qu Feiyan proposed.

Yilin was even more frightened about the idea of wandering around the brothel all by herself. “No, no, I am not going,” she cried out immediately.

“Once you decide to save somebody, you’ve got to follow through. You can just put the pills in his mouth and then give him some tea to help him swallow. In the dark, he can’t see who you are. What are you so afraid of? Here, here’s the tea cup, be careful, don’t drop it,” Qu Feiyan said.

Slowly reaching out with her hand, Yilin took the tea. Pausing, she thought to herself, “Master has always told us that as Buddhists we should always be merciful to others. Saving a life achieves more than building a seven-story

pagoda for Buddha. Even if this man doesn't know where Big Brother Linghu's body is, he is on the verge of dying, and I should still try to save his life." So she slowly extended her right hand. When the back of her hand touched the man's forehead, she turned her hand over and placed three "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pills" into his mouth. He swallowed them with the tea served by Yilin and then murmured something that seemed to be words of gratitude.

"Sir, I know you are wounded badly, I really should let you rest, but I have one urgent thing to ask you. Hero Linghu Chong was murdered, his body....," Yilin said.

"You...you are asking for Linghu Chong...?" the man croaked.

"Yes! Do you know where hero Linghu Chong's body is?" Yilin asked anxiously.

The man mumbled some words, but his voice was too low for Yilin to make anything out of them. Yilin asked one more time, and then moved her ear close to the man's lips, but all she could hear was his heavy breathing. It seemed that he wanted to say something but could not make the words come out.

Yilin suddenly remembered. The "Heavenly Connecting Glue" and "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pills" were wonderful treatments for wounds, but they were both very strong medicines as well, particularly the "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pill." Anyone would pass out for a half day after taking it. It was just an important step of the healing process. How could she be so self absorbed as to push him to talk at that moment? She sighed gently and moved out from under the curtain and sat down on a chair near the bed.

"I'll wait till he feels better and then ask again," she murmured to herself.

"Sis, is he going to be alright?" Qu Feiyan asked.

"I hope he will recover, but the wound on his chest is really deep. Qu, who...who is he?" Yilin asked. But Qu Feiyan



did not answer.

“My grandpa said you couldn’t let a lot of things go,” Qu Feiyan said after a while. “You really shouldn’t be a nun.”

“Your grandpa knows me?” Yilin asked in surprise. “How does he...he know that I cannot let things go?”

“Yesterday in the Huiyan Wine House, Grandpa and I were watching your fight with Tian Boguang.”

“Ah,” Yilin said, “so your grandpa was the one sitting with you?”

“Yeah.” Qu Feiyan smiled. “Your Big Brother Linghu really had a quick tongue. When he said he was the second best at fighting while sitting down, Grandpa actually believed him and thought he really knew some kind of sword art he created while in the toilet that could defeat Tian Boguang. Ha-ha.”

Yilin could not see her face in the dark, but she could imagine that the little girl must be giggling quite hard. The more gleeful Qu Feiyan was the more sorrow Yilin felt.

Qu Feiyan went on, “Later, after Tian Boguang ran away, Grandpa said he had no guts. He had promised to be your apprentice, and should have kowtowed to you and called you Master. How could he go back on his word?”

“Big Brother Linghu only tricked him to save my life, he did not really win the fight,” Yilin explained.

“Sis, you are truly kind. After the way Tian Boguang treated you, you’re still making excuses for him. Anyway, after Big Brother Linghu was killed, you just carried his body and wandered around with no specific destination. Grandpa said, ‘This little nun is really a passionate girl. I am afraid she is going to go insane. Let’s follow her and watch.’ So the two of us followed behind you and watched how you just carried his body and didn’t want to let him go. Grandpa said, ‘Feifei, see how upset this little nun is. If this lad Linghu Chong

weren't dead, the little nun would definitely give up the nunnery and marry him.'"

Yilin flushed with great embarrassment. She could feel her face and ears burning in the dark.

"Sis, was my grandpa right?"

"He died because of me," Yilin said. "I really wish I was the one who died instead of him. If Buddha pities me, and lets me die in exchange for Big Brother Linghu's life, I...I... even if I had to fall all the way to the bottom of the eighteenth level of hell and never be reborn again,<sup>39</sup> I would not complain." Her voice was filled with sincerity as she said those words.

All of a sudden, the man on the bed let out a groan.

"He...he is awake. Qu, would you please ask him if he feels better?" Yilin said happily.

"Why do I have to be the one to ask? Don't you have a tongue of your own?" Qu Feiyan demanded.

Yilin walked to the bed after a slight hesitation, and with the curtain in between them, asked, "Sir, are you...?" Before she could finish, the man let out several more groans.

"He is in great pain right now, I shouldn't bother him," she thought, so she just stood there quietly. The man's breathing gradually fell into a slow rhythm. Apparently the medicine was doing its job, and he had fallen asleep again.

"Sis," Qu Feiyan whispered, "why would you die for Linghu Chong? Do you really like him that much?"

"No, no! Miss Qu, I am a Buddhist nun. Please don't say such disrespectful words to Buddha! Big Brother Linghu and I had never met each other before, but he gave his life to save mine. I...I just feel I owe him so much!" Yilin said breathlessly.

"What if he was alive again? Would you be willing to do anything for him?"

"Yes, even if I had to die a thousand times for him, I would have no complaints."

Qu Feiyan suddenly raised her voice and said, "Big Brother Linghu, listen up, sis Yilin said it herself...."

"Don't joke about it!" Yilin cut her off angrily.

Qu Feiyan simply ignored her and continued in a loud voice. "She said: if you are not dead, she would do anything for you."

From Qu's tone, Yilin could feel that she really wasn't joking. Her heart started pounding faster and faster, and she also began to get dizzy. She could only murmur, "You... you..." Within seconds, Qu Feiyan lit a candle. She opened the curtain and beckoned Yilin over with a big smile on her face. Yilin slowly walked to the bed full of dread. Suddenly, it seemed as if the entire world started swirling around her; she found herself falling down to the ground.

Qu Feiyan quickly caught her by the shoulder before she actually hit the floor.

"I know this is going to be a big surprise! Go ahead and see who he is!" she exclaimed.

"He...he...." Yilin's voice was so weak, and she could hardly breathe. Although the man on the bed had his eyes shut tightly, with his thick eyebrows and thin lips on a long rectangular face, Yilin immediately recognized him. It was none other than the one who had fought at the Huiyan Wine House, Linghu Chong.

Yilin grabbed Qu Feiyan's arm tightly. "He...he is not dead?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"He is not dead yet, but if your medicine doesn't work, he'll die soon." Qu Feiyan smiled gently.

"He won't die, he definitely won't die! He...he is alive!" Filled with surprise and happiness, the emotions overwhelmed Yilin, and she started crying.

"Hey, he's not dead, what are you crying for?" Qu Feiyan asked curiously.

Yilin felt her legs giving out on her, so she had to lean on the bed as she continued to shed more tears.

"I am so happy!" she said. "Qu, I don't know how to thank you enough! You saved...saved Big Brother Linghu."

"Hey, you saved him. I don't have the skills to save him, and I don't have 'Heavenly Connecting Glue' either!" Qu Feiyan said.

Suddenly, Yilin understood. She stood up slowly and held Qu Feiyan's hand. "Your grandpa did it. It was your grandpa!"

Someone shouted outside, "Yilin, Yilin!" That was the voice of Sister Dingyi. Yilin was astounded, and was just about to answer when Qu Feiyan blew out the candle in her hands and then covered Yilin's mouth.

"Don't you remember what kind of a place this is? Don't answer!" she hissed at Yilin.

Yilin found herself bewildered. It was quite embarrassing being in a brothel, but refusing to answer her Master's call, that was something she had never done before in her life.

Dingyi's voice rang out, "Tian Boguang, get your ass out here! Let Yilin go!"

Tian Boguang's laughter came from the westside room. "Well! If it isn't the White-Cloud Nunnery Senior Sister Dingyi of the Heng-Shan Sword School!" he continued cackling for a few moments, and then finally spoke. "I really should go out to pay my respects, but to leave all these cute ladies here on my bed alone wouldn't be good manners either. I guess I'll just stay here then. Ha-ha, ha-ha!" The coquettish laughter of several girls joined in. Obviously the women were prostitutes. "Sweetheart, don't pay any attention to her. Give me another kiss..." one of them said huskily. The lascivious voices of the women grew louder and louder. Tian Boguang must have egged them on to keep Sister Dingyi away.

Dingyi was outraged. "Tian Boguang, if you don't get your ass out here, I will cut you into ten thousand pieces!" she shouted.

Tian Boguang laughed. "If I don't get my ass out, you'll cut me into pieces. If I do haul my ass out, you'll cut me into pieces just as well. I guess I'd better keep my ass put. Sister

Dingyi, you nuns really shouldn't be in places like this. Why don't you go back to your nice convent? Your apprentice is not here. She is a model nun who always follows all the convent rules. Why would she come here? Don't you think it's rather bizarre for your holiness to come here to look for your apprentice?"

Dingyi exploded. "Blazes! I'm going to set this damn place on fire! We'll see how long he can stay in there!" she retorted.

Tian Boguang laughed again. "Sister Dingyi, this spot is named the 'Jade House,' and it is one of the most famous sites in the town of Hengshan. I suppose it would be no big deal if you set it on fire, but when the story gets out, everybody'll know that it was Sister Dingyi from the White-Cloud Nunnery of the Heng-Shan Sword School who burnt down the 'Jade House' brothel in Hengshan. People who hear this would ask themselves, 'Sister Dingyi is a respectful senior Sister, why would she go to such a filthy place?' The answer would be that, 'She went there to look for her apprentice!' People who hear this would have to ask, 'Why did the apprentice of the Heng-Shan Sword School go to the Jade House?'...I'm guessing that all these questions wouldn't do the reputation of your school any good. Let me tell you something, Tian Boguang fears nothing and nobody in this entire world except that apprentice of yours. I'd be busy running away at the sight of her. How would I be able to bother her?"

Dingyi reluctantly saw his point, but an apprentice had reported that she saw Yilin walking into this house with her own eyes, and Tian Boguang had also attacked her. There could have been no mistake. Her anger kept growing, but the only thing she could do was to stamp the flagstones beneath her feet.

"Tian Boguang, did you murder my apprentice Peng Renqi?" demanded a voice from the roof across the way. The Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School had arrived.

“Aha! Even the respectful Head Master of Qingcheng Sword School has come to visit,” Tian Boguang crowed. “Hengshan Jade House is going to be so appallingly famous from now on. They’ll never need to worry about getting business again! I did kill a fellow. His sword skills were ordinary, but seemed to be the moves of the Qingcheng Sword School. But as to whether his name was Peng Renqi or not, sorry, I really didn’t have the time to ask.”

Within the space of a blink, Yu Canghai leapt into Tian Boguang’s room, and a shower of ringing steel followed; Yu Canghai had started fighting with Tian Boguang. Sister Dingyi stood on the roof and listened to the sound of clashing weapons.

“That rascal Tian Boguang really has some skills,” she thought to herself. “His quick knife strokes seem to be evenly matched with the sword thrusts from the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School.”

Suddenly there was a loud “bang” followed by absolute silence. Yilin held onto Qu Feiyan’s hand tightly; cold sweat soaked her palms. She had no idea who had won the fight, Tian or Yu? Tian Boguang had bullied her several times, and she should have wished for Yu Canghai to win, but deep in her heart, she was really hoping the opposite. It would be better if Yu Canghai and her Master were to just leave, so that Linghu Chong could rest and heal peacefully and quietly. He was already on the brink of death, and if Yu Canghai were to rush into the room, the stress itself would surely cause his wounds to break open and kill him.

Tian Boguang’s voice rose from afar, “Master Yu, don’t you think it’s a little crowded in this room? Let’s go to the clearing in the field and fight a couple hundred rounds and see who the better man is! If you win, I’ll relinquish this cute hottie ‘Little Jade’ to you! But if you lose, this chick will have to be mine!”

Yu Canghai almost exploded in anger. The scoundrel’s words had implied that they were fighting to gain the favor of

a whore named "Little Jade" in the "Jade House." He considered his situation. When they were fighting inside the room, over fifty bouts passed in no time. Tian Boguang's knife moves were well organized and balanced in both attack and defense. His skills were really no less than that of his own. Even if they were to fight another couple of hundred rounds, he still couldn't ensure victory would be his.

Everything quieted down. Yilin could even hear her own heartbeat. She leaned closer to Qu's ear and asked in a whisper, "Do you think...they will come in here?"

Qu was actually much younger than her, yet Yilin was completely helpless in such an embarrassing situation. Qu did not answer, and just covered Yilin's mouth with her hand.

Liu Zhengfeng's voice suddenly rose. "Master Yu, the villain Tian Boguang has committed so many crimes; he definitely won't come to a good end. We'll get him eventually. There's no rush right now. This brothel has been the source of much immoral behavior; I have always wanted to trash it. Please let me handle this. Danian, Weiyi, Let's search inside. Don't let anybody leave!"

Xiang Danian and Mi Weiyi, the two apprentices of Liu House, acknowledged the command in unison. Dingyi also sent out orders and had her apprentices surround the brothel.

Yilin became increasingly worried. She could hear the voices of the apprentices from the Liu House coming closer and closer, searching room after room. Liu Zhengfeng and Yu Canghai stood by the side and directed the apprentices. Loud cries from the proprietors could be clearly heard while they were thrashed by Xiang Danian, Mi Weiyi, and the rest of the apprentices. Apprentices of the Qingcheng Sword School began smashing furniture, teacups and wine kettles, leaving a trail of destruction behind them. Knowing that all those people would soon arrive, Yilin became so worried that she almost passed out.

"My Master came to rescue me," she thought, "and I did not answer her call. I am in a brothel and in the same room with Big Brother Linghu late at night. Even though he is badly wounded, when all those guys from the Hengshan Sword School and the Qingcheng Sword School come in all at once, I wouldn't be able to explain the situation even if I had a hundred tongues. The reputation of the Heng-Shan Sword School would undoubtedly be damaged and how...how can I face my Master and all the apprentice sisters again?" She drew her sword and brought the blade toward her own throat.

Qu Feiyan heard the sound of a sword unsheathing and instantly realized what Yilin was doing. She grasped Yilin's wrist quickly.

"Stop! Let's dash out together," she whispered.

Sounds of movement came from the bed. Linghu Chong had sat up.

"Light the candle!" he whispered.

"Why?" Qu Feiyan asked.

"I am telling you to light the candle!" Linghu Chong said. His voice had a tone of authority in it. Qu Feiyan did not say another word and lit the candle.

With the light of the candle, Yilin could see Linghu Chong's white and bloodless face, a face that looked almost like that of a corpse. She uttered a cry.

Linghu Chong pointed at his overcoat at the end of the bed.

"Put that over...over my shoulders," he said.

While trembling like a falling leaf in a storm, Yilin picked up the overcoat and draped it over Linghu Chong's shoulders. Linghu Chong pulled the front of the overcoat so that it covered all the bloodstains and the wound on his chest.

"You two, lie on the bed," he said.

"This is fun!" Qu Feiyan giggled. She dragged Yilin and they slipped under the quilt.



By then, the people outside had noticed the candlelight in the room. "Let's check that room out!" someone shouted. They all started to head toward the small room.

Linghu Chong took a deep breath, rushed to close the door, and locked it with a wooden bar. He walked back to the bed and lifted the curtain.

"Hide under the quilt!" he ordered.

"Don't...don't move too much. Watch out for your wounds," Yilin begged.

Linghu Chong stuck his left hand out and pushed her head under the quilt while pulling Qu's long hair out from under the quilt and spreading it all over the pillow. Just that simple movement caused his wound to break open, and blood gushed out again. He lost the strength in his legs and had to sit on the bed.

Someone had already started knocking on the door heavily and it sounded like he was beating a drum. "You son of a turtle, open the door!" one of them shouted. Then with a loud cracking sound, the door was kicked open and four people rushed in.

The leading person was none other than the Qingcheng apprentice Hong Renxiong. Astonished to see Linghu Chong, he immediately jumped back several paces.

"Linghu...It's Linghu Chong...." he muttered.

Xiang Danian and Mi Weiyi had never met Linghu Chong before, but had both heard that Luo Renjie had killed him. So when they heard Hong Renxiong shouting out Linghu Chong's name both were shocked and also stepped back. Everyone had his eyes wide open and just gazed at Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong stood up slowly. "You...this many people...." he muttered.

"Linghu...Linghu Chong, you're...you're not dead?" Hong Renxiong murmured.

"How can I die so easily?" Linghu Chong answered coldly.

Yu Canghai stepped forward. "You are Linghu Chong? Excellent, excellent!" he said. Linghu Chong glanced at him but did not answer.

"What are you doing in this brothel?" Yu Canghai demanded.

Linghu Chong began laughing loudly. "Are you kidding me? What do you think people do in brothels?"

"I've heard that the Huashan Sword School has very strict school rules," Yu Canghai said coldly. "You are the senior apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, the best student of 'Gentleman Sword' Mr. Yue, yet you sneak up here to sleep with prostitutes. Very funny! How very ironic!"

"Whatever rules the Huashan Sword School has," Linghu Chong said, "that's our own business. No need for you or anybody else to worry about it."

Yu Canghai was an experienced person. Seeing Linghu Chong's extremely white face because of blood loss, and his trembling legs, he could tell that Linghu Chong had been wounded badly. Could it be a trap? Then he thought, "The little nun of the Heng-Shan Sword School said this guy was killed by Renjie, but he is actually still alive. Obviously the little nun was lying to cover things up. During her tale, she called him Big Brother Linghu this and Big Brother Linghu that, so full of tenderness; maybe they have already become a couple. Someone saw the little nun coming to this brothel, but now no one can find her; most likely this guy has hidden her somewhere. Hmm! The Five Mountains Sword Alliance always considered themselves the true Martial Arts academies, and looked down upon my Qingcheng Sword School. If I can sort that little nun out, then not only would the reputation of the Huashan Sword School and the Heng-Shan Sword School be trashed, the entire Five Mountains Sword Alliance would also be humiliated, and they would never be able to flaunt themselves in the Martial World again!" He looked around quickly but did not see anyone

else besides Linghu Chong. "Looks like that little nun is hiding in the bed," he concluded.

"Renxiong! Lift open the bed curtain. Let's find out what kind of show we have in the bed," he said to Hong Renxiong.

"Yes, Master!" Hong Renxiong answered and then stepped forward. With his previous unpleasant encounter with Linghu Chong still fresh in his mind, he couldn't help glancing at Linghu Chong and hesitating.

"Do you want to die?" Linghu Chong threatened.

Hong Renxiong choked, but reassured by the presence of his master, he felt better and drew his sword.

"What do you want?" Linghu Chong asked Yu Canghai.

"The Heng-Shan Sword School lost a female apprentice; someone saw her in this brothel, so we need to search here," Yu Canghai demanded.

"This is the Five Mountains Sword Alliance's own matter. Why doesn't the Qingcheng Sword School mind its own business?" Linghu Chong mocked.

"We will find an answer today, whether you like it or not! Renxiong, go for it!" Yu Canghai ordered.

"Yes sir!" Hong Renxiong held his sword out and used the blade to lift the bed curtain.

Yilin and Qu Feiyan held on to each other as they hid under the quilt; they heard every word between Linghu Chong and Yu Canghai loudly and clearly. Greatly worried, they could not help trembling. Then when they heard the sound of Hong Renxiong lifting the bed curtain, both were frightened to death.

After Hong Renxiong had lifted up the bed curtain, everyone stared at the bed. There was a large red silk quilt with two love birds embroidered on it. Obviously there was someone under the quilt. Long black hair was spread all over the pillow. The quilt was trembling. The person under the quilt must have been terrified.

Yu Canghai was very disappointed when he saw the long hair on the pillow. It was quite obvious that the one under the

quilt was not a bald little nun. Linghu Chong was really sleeping with a prostitute.

"Master Yu," Linghu Chong said coldly, "although you are a Taoist Priest, I heard that Qingcheng priests don't have rules against marriage and you've already got yourself many wives. If you are so fond of naked woman, and want to see the girl naked, why don't you go ahead and lift up the quilt to have a good look? Why pretend to look for a female apprentice of the Heng-Shan Sword School?"

"Damn you!" Yu Canghai yelled while throwing a knife hand chop at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong turned his body aside to dodge the blow coming toward him, but he was quite weak because of his wounds and wasn't able to dodge fast enough; the edge of Yu Canghai's chopping blow glanced his body. He could not hold himself steady and collapsed onto the bed. Gathering all his strength, Linghu Chong stood up again, but blood began dripping out from the corner of his mouth. His body shook a couple of times as he spat out some more blood. Yu Canghai wanted to hit him again, but out of the blue, a voice came from outside the window.

"A senior bullies a junior; how shameless!"

Yu Canghai did not waste any time. Before the last word had ended, he had already thrown a blow toward the window. Immediately following the blow, he jumped out the window. From the illumination of the candlelight inside the room, he saw an ugly hunchback turning around the corner of the house.

"Hold it!" he shouted.

The hunchback was really Lin Pingzhi in disguise. After the conflict with Yu Canghai in Liu Zhengfeng's house, he slipped out while Yu Canghai's mind was preoccupied with the little girl, Qu Feiyan. He hid behind a corner of the house and did not know what to do. He could not think of any way to rescue his parents.

"Everyone in the hall will have remembered me as the ugly hunchback," he thought to himself. "When those people

from the Qingcheng Sword School see me again, they will definitely kill me without hesitation. Should I change back to my original look?" He thought of how Yu Canghai had grabbed onto his wrist; how he felt like he had lost all his strength and couldn't even struggle to get away. How could there be someone with such outstanding martial arts skills? All these thoughts flooded his mind; he completely lost track of time. He had no idea how long he had been hiding around the corner when he suddenly felt a pat on his hunchback. Stunned, he turned around quickly. The first thing he saw was a tall hunchback. It was none other than the real hunchback - "Hunchback of the North" Mu Gaofeng.

"You fake hunchback," Mu grinned, "what's so good about being a hunchback? Why the hell do you pretend to be my grandchild?"

Lin Pingzhi knew the hunchback was a very vicious man with very high Martial Arts skills. If any of his words displeased Mu, he could easily end up dead. He thought since he had already kowtowed to Mu when they were back in the great hall, and called him a true hero that helped the weak to fight the villains, and Mu did not get mad, all he needed to do was to maintain the same tone, and he surely wouldn't make Mu Gaofeng mad.

"I heard from many people that 'Hunchback of the North' Hero Mu has a very reputable name, and he always helped the weak when needed. I truly admire you, and that's why I dressed myself just like Hero Mu. Please forgive me," he apologized.

"Are you kidding me? A reputable name and helping the weak when needed? What nonsense!"

Mu Gaofeng laughed. He knew Lin Pingzhi was lying to his face, yet all these compliments sounded very enjoyable and pleasing.

"What's your name? Who's your Master?" he asked.

"Lin is really my family name. I unintentionally used your last name," Lin Pingzhi said.

Mu Gaofeng smirked. "Cut the crap! You just wanted to use my name to swindle and bluff. Yu Canghai is the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School. He could kill you by just poking you with one finger. Yet you were so bold as to offend him! You really have some guts!"

Hearing Yu Canghai's name mentioned, Lin Pingzhi's anger instantly exploded. "As long as I am still breathing, one day I will slay the scoundrel myself!" he exclaimed loudly.

"What score do you have with Yu Canghai?" asked the surprised Mu Gaofeng.

Lin Pingzhi hesitated for a few seconds. He thought, "There's no way for me to rescue my mom and dad all by myself. Why don't I ask him to help?" So he knelt down and kowtowed to Mu Gaofeng.

"My parents are his prisoners. I am begging you. Will you please help me rescue them?"

Mu Gaofeng frowned and shook his head. "I never do anything that does not benefit me. Who is your dad? What do I get if I rescue him?"

Someone's voice suddenly came from the door, whispering with urgency, "Go tell Master that in the brothel known as the Jade House, another Qingcheng Sword School member has been killed. Also someone from the Heng-Shan Sword School was wounded and just got back. Hurry!"

"We'll talk about your troubles later," Mu Gaofeng whispered to Lin Pingzhi. "There's going to be a good show. Come with me if you want to see some fun."

"As long as I am with him, I can always beg him later," Lin Pingzhi thought. So he replied, "Sure, sure! Wherever you, the respectful senior, want to go, I'll follow."

"Let's get this straight first: I, hunchback Mu, only do things that I can benefit from. If you think brown-nosing can get your grandpa to get into trouble for you, save yourself the trouble and just forget about it!" Mu Gaofeng exclaimed. Lin Pingzhi just nodded and didn't say a word.

“They’ve left. Follow me,” Mu Gaofeng said. Lin Pingzhi only felt his right wrist being grabbed tightly, and before he knew it, he was already in the air and seemed to be speeding along the streets without even touching the ground.

Soon they arrived outside the Jade House. The two of them hid behind a tree and peered at the scene before them. They heard everything including the fight between Yu Canghai and Tian Boguang, the search led by Liu Zhengfeng’s apprentices, and the words of Linghu Chong. When Yu Canghai wanted to hit Linghu Chong again, Lin Pingzhi could not hold his anger any longer and shouted out, “A senior bullies a junior; how shameless!” Right after that, he realized he had acted very rashly and quickly turned around to hide. But Yu Canghai came so fast that with the words “hold it,” the power of his hands had already immobilized Lin Pingzhi.

At that moment, all Yu needed to do was to release his inner strength and Lin Pingzhi’s internal organs would be smashed into pieces, but after recognizing it was the young hunchback, Yu Canghai held back his strength and did not strike.

“So it’s you!” he sneered.

He looked at Mu Gaofeng, who stood about ten feet behind Lin Pingzhi. “Hunchback Mu! Why do you instigate juniors to trouble me over and over again? What do you want?” he demanded.

Mu Gaofeng burst into loud laughter. “He claims to be my junior, but I never said he was! His name is Lin and mine is Mu, I have nothing to do with him. Master Yu, I, hunchback Mu, am not afraid of you; I just don’t want to be a retard and shield some nobody from trouble. If there are great benefits for being a shield, like piles of gold or jewels or something, then I’d consider doing it! Free service like this will never interest me.”

Yu Canghai was quite happy to hear these words. “If this individual has nothing to do with brother Mu and is only an

imposter, then I don't have to worry on your behalf," he said. He was just about to strike when he heard someone speaking "A senior bullies a junior; how shameless!"

Yu Canghai turned back and saw a man standing by the window. It was none other than Linghu Chong. Yu Canghai was infuriated, but the words "a senior bullies a junior; how shameless" were right on target. The two young men's Kung Fu skills were no match for him; to kill them would be as easy as stepping on a puny ant. But he would never be able to get rid of the remark "a senior bullies a junior." And if the remark of "a senior bullies a junior" were true, of course "shameless" would be the natural conclusion. But if he just simply let these two off, he wouldn't be able to vent his anger. He sneered and said to Linghu Chong, "I'll have your Master pay for your insolence later." Then he turned to Lin Pingzhi.

"Which school are you from?" he asked.

"You murderous monster, you ruined my entire family, and you are still asking me?" Lin Pingzhi yelled furiously.

Yu Canghai was confused. "Have I met you before? How did I ruin your family? What are you talking about?" he thought to himself. With so many people around watching, he did not want to ask for more details, so he turned to Hong Renxiong. "Renxiong, waste him first, then seize Linghu Chong."

If a Qingcheng apprentice did it, it wouldn't be "a senior bullies a junior." Hong Renxiong answered, "Yes, Master!" He drew his sword and jumped forward. Lin Pingzhi went for his own sword, but before he could unsheathe it, Hong Renxiong's long cold sword was already pointed at his chest.

Lin Pingzhi yelled, "Yu Canghai, I, Lin Pingzhi, will...."

Astounded, Yu Canghai hurriedly struck out with his left palm. The energy of the strike sent Hong Renxiong's thrust aside and the sword barely missed Lin Pingzhi's right arm.

"What did you say?" Yu Canghai asked.

"Even if I, Lin Pingzhi, have to become a disembodied ghost, I'll come back and kill you," Lin Pingzhi exclaimed.



“Are you...are you Lin Pingzhi from the Fortune Prestige Escort House?” Yu Canghai asked in shock.

Lin Pingzhi thought, “Since I can’t hide my identity any more, I’d rather have a quick death.” So he pulled the plasters off his face and said loudly, “That’s right! I am Lin Pingzhi from Fuzhou Fortune Prestige Escort House. Your son harassed an innocent girl and I killed him. You ruined my entire family. Where...where are you keeping my father and my mother?”

The news of Qingcheng’s triumph over the Fortune Prestige Escort House had spread all over the Martial World. Most people didn’t know that Evergreen had lost in a sword fight with Lin Yuantu, so rumor said that it was really because the Qingcheng Sword School wanted to seize the Lin family’s manuscript of the “Evil-Resisting Sword Art.” And because Linghu Chong had heard the rumor, he used it to lure Luo Renjie into coming closer and then killed him. Mu Gaofeng had also heard the rumor. After the fake hunchback claimed to be “Lin Pingzhi from the Fortune Prestige Escort House,” seeing how Yu Canghai knocked aside Hong Renxiong’s sword in such a hurry and how he acted so nervously, Mu Gaofeng had no doubt that Yu Canghai really wanted to track down the “Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript” with the help of this young man. When Yu Canghai stretched his arm out and grabbed onto Lin Pingzhi’s right wrist, pulling his arm back to drag Lin over, Mu Gaofeng shouted, “Hold it!” He jumped forth rapidly and grabbed onto Lin Pingzhi’s left wrist and started pulling as well.

Lin Pingzhi could feel two great sources of power pulling his arms in opposite directions; all his joints started popping and he almost passed out from the severe pain. Yu Canghai knew very well that Lin Pingzhi would die instantly if he pulled any harder, so he thrust his long sword at Mu Gaofeng as he yelled out loudly, “Brother Mu, let him go!” Mu Gaofeng waved his right arm and blocked the sword with a shining crescent knife. A loud ring echoed. Wasting no time, Yu

Canghai launched his sword attacks, and within seconds, he had sent nine thrusts at Mu Gaofeng.

"Brother Mu, we don't have any score to settle between us. Why should we hurt our relationship because of this lad?" He said while tightly holding on to Lin Pingzhi's right wrist.

Waving his crescent knife back and forth, Mu Gaofeng countered all of Yu Canghai's attacks.

"Earlier, right in front of everyone's eyes, this lad kowtowed to me and called me 'Grandpa.' Everyone saw that and heard that. Although I don't have any score to settle with you, Master Yu, don't you think it would look bad for me if you seized someone who just called me 'Grandpa' and then killed him right in front of my eyes? If this 'Grandpa' can't even protect his grandson, then who else is going to call me 'Grandpa' in the future?"

The two talked as they fought at a faster and faster pace. The clash of weapons also became more urgent.

"Brother Mu, this man killed my son. How can I forget the pain of losing a son and not avenge him?" Yu Canghai said angrily.

"Sure," Mu Gaofeng laughed, "for Master Yu's sake, I'll help you seek your revenge. Come on, you pull to the left and I'll pull to the right, one two three, let's tear this lad to two!" After the words, he actually started counting, "One, two, and three!" As soon as he spat out the word three, he pulled harder. More of Lin Pingzhi's joints popped.

Yu Canghai was stunned. There was no need to rush the revenge. Before finding the sword art manuscript, he definitely didn't want to let Lin Pingzhi die. So he let go of Lin's wrist at once, letting Mu Gaofeng pull Lin Pingzhi away.

"Hey, thanks!" Mu Gaofeng grinned. "Master Yu is really a true friend! You even gave up taking revenge for your son for Hunchback Mu's sake. There's no other one in the Martial World who respects brotherhood as much as you do!"

"I am glad brother Mu knows that. I'll give in a little this time. There won't be a second time," Yu Canghai said coldly.

“Who knows? Maybe Master Yu would be just as nice next time and give in again,” Mu Gaofeng snickered.

With a disgruntled snort, Yu Canghai waved his left arm. “Let’s go!” he commanded, and all the Qingcheng apprentices left following their Master. At that moment, Sister Dingyi also headed south together with all the Heng-Shan nuns, to try to locate Yilin. Liu Zhengfeng and his apprentices had gone to the southeast corner to continue their search. So after the group from the Qingcheng Sword School left, only Mu Gaofeng and Lin Pingzhi stood outside of the Jade House.

“Hey, you are not a hunchback. You are a handsome lad!” Mu Gaofeng said with a grin. “Lad, you don’t have to call me Grandpa. I kind of like you. How about I take you as my apprentice?”

Lin Pingzhi was still in pain from being pulled between two types of high-level inner strength and had just caught his breath. Hearing Mu Gaofeng’s suggestion, he thought, “The hunchback’s Kung Fu is ten times greater than Dad’s. Even Yu Canghai was in dread of him. In my quest to seek my revenge, it would actually become possible if I have him as my teacher. But he did not care about me at all when the Qingcheng apprentice tried to kill me. However, as soon as he heard my real identity, he started to fight Yu Canghai to get hold of me. In that light, his offer to take me as his apprentice must not have come with good intentions.”

Mu Gaofeng saw his hesitation. “You already know how good the Hunchback of the North’s Kung Fu skills and fame are. I’ve never had an apprentice before. If you have me as your teacher, I will teach you all my Kung Fu skills without any reservation. By then, not only would the chaps from Qingcheng be no match for you, but after a couple of years, it would be easy to defeat Yu Canghai as well. Lad, why aren’t you kowtowing to me to show respect to your Master?”

The more anxious he sounded, the more suspicious Lin Pingzhi became. “If he really cared about me, why did he grab on to my wrist and pull so hard with no reservation?

After Yu Canghai found out that I was the one who had killed his son, he actually wanted me alive. Obviously it was all because he wanted some 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' There are many honest people with high Kung Fu skills in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. If I want a good teacher, I should be looking amongst them. The hunchback here is too vicious. No matter how high his skills are, I'll never have him as my Master."

Seeing Lin Pingzhi still hesitating, Mu Gaofeng felt his anger growing. But he still managed a smile. "What? You think the hunchback's Kung Fu skills are no good, and I am not worthy to be your master?" he asked.

Lin Pingzhi noticed the fleeting look of anger and viciousness on Mu Gaofeng's face before it changed into a warm and kind smile. He knew he was in a very delicate and dangerous situation. If he refused to call him Master, Mu would probably get infuriated and kill him right away. So he said, "Hero Mu, your offer to take me as your apprentice is a fortune I never even dared dream of. But I have been learning my family Kung Fu skills. If I want to study from another great Master, I must get permission from my father. This is not only the family rule, but also the common practice in the Martial World."

"That sounds reasonable." Mu Gaofeng nodded. "But what little skills you demonstrated here today are not even close to being called Kung Fu. Your father's Kung Fu must also be very limited. I only had a sudden impulse today wanting to take you as my apprentice. Later, I might not be similarly inclined. Good opportunities don't come by easily. You seem to be a smart lad. Why are you acting so foolishly? How about this? You kowtow to me and call me your Master first, and then I will go talk to your father. I am sure he wouldn't dare have a different opinion."

Lin Pingzhi suddenly had an idea. "Hero Mu," he said, "my parents were taken prisoners by the Qingcheng Sword School. I don't even know if they are still alive or dead yet. I

beg you, hero Mu, to get them out. After that, I would be so grateful that no matter what you tell me to do, I will follow with all my heart."

Mu Gaofeng became livid. "What?" he exploded. "Are you bargaining with me? Do I have to have you as my apprentice? Who do you think you are? This is just outrageous!" Then he remembered that even Yu Canghai gave in right in front of so many eyes and did not want to tear his son's killer into two; he must have had very good reasons. People like Yu Canghai were not the type that could be easily fooled. The rumor that the "Evil-Resisting Sword Art" was truly amazing was probably true. If he could take this lad as his apprentice, then sooner or later, he would get his hands on that outstanding martial arts book. At that thought, he urged again.

"Hurry up and kowtow to me. After three kowtows, you will be my apprentice. Of course the Master will take care of the apprentice's parents. Since Yu Canghai captured my apprentice's parents, when I go ask for them from him, my request would be totally justified. How dare he object?"

Lin Pingzhi really wanted to save his parents. He thought, "Mom and Dad are prisoners of that villain. Every day would seem like a year for them. I need to get them out as soon as possible. As long as he can rescue my parents, I'd be willing to give up anything, let alone taking him as my Master." So he knelt down in front of Mu Gaofeng to kowtow.

Afraid that Lin Pingzhi might change his mind again, Mu Gaofeng put his hand on Lin Pingzhi's head and pushed down. Lin Pingzhi was ready to kowtow to him, but when he felt the push from the top of his head, he was filled with repugnance and naturally straightened his neck and resisted.

"Hey, kowtow!" Mu Gaofeng yelled angrily. He pushed down even harder.

Lin Pingzhi was quite egotistical; when he was still the Young Master of the house, others always flattered him and he never had to take any humiliation. Now in order to rescue

his parents, he had already decided to kowtow, but when Mu Gaofeng pushed down his head, it actually aroused his stubborn nature.

"I will agree to be your apprentice only after you agree to rescue my parents. But there's no way I am going to kowtow today!" he said loudly.

"Did you say no way? Let's give it a try and see if there's really no way!" Mu Gaofeng said angrily. He pushed even harder.

Lin Pingzhi fought with all his strength and struggled to stand up, but he felt as if he was under a thousand-pound rock, and simply could not, so he pushed on the ground with his hands and struggled some more. Gradually, Mu Gaofeng added more and more strength into the push. Lin Pingzhi could hear his neck joints cracking because of the pressure.

"Kowtow or not? Just a bit more strength from my hand will break your neck," Mu Gaofeng said while laughing loudly.

Lin Pingzhi's head was pushed down inch by inch, and soon was only half foot from the ground. "I won't! I won't!" he kept on yelling.

"Let's see how you won't kowtow." Mu Gaofeng used a little bit more strength and Lin Pingzhi's forehead went two inches closer to the ground. Suddenly, Lin Pingzhi felt heat coming from his back and a stream of smooth energy fed into his body; the pressure atop his head suddenly felt like nothing. He pushed the ground and then easily stood up.

This was a complete surprise for Lin Pingzhi. To Mu Gaofeng, the surprise was even greater. The inner strength that overwhelmed his strength seemed to be the famous "Divine Art of Violet Twilight" of the Huashan Sword School. He had heard before that this style of inner strength started off indistinct, like the twilight in the sky, but its stamina had great persistency, and the strength would later be released like a storm with devastating power. That was why it got the name, "Violet Twilight." Astonished, Mu Gaofeng quickly put his hand back on Lin Pingzhi's head, but as soon as his hand

touched Lin Pingzhi's forehead, a stream of persistent energy rose from Lin's forehead and shocked his hand. Mu Gaofeng felt numbness in his arm and dull pain coming from his chest.

Mu Gaofeng stepped back. "Is that Brother Yue of the Huashan Sword School?" he asked with a dry smile. "Why are you hiding behind the corner to play tricks on a hunchback?"

Smiling, a man with the look of a scholar strolled out from behind the corner of the wall. Waving a folding fan leisurely in his right hand, he looked very graceful.

"Brother Mu," the man greeted, "after so many years, you still look so young and energetic. How wonderful!"

Mu Gaofeng immediately recognized him. He was indeed "Gentleman Sword" Yue Buqun, Head Master of the Huashan Sword School. Mu had always been in dread of him. Now since Mu was caught bullying a junior who basically had no Kung Fu skills, and because Yue even gave the young lad a helping hand, Mu Gaofeng felt very awkward.

"Brother Yue," he grinned, "you are just getting younger and younger. I wish you could be my Master and teach me this 'Yin Yang Nourishment'<sup>40</sup> method."

"Bah! You hunchback, stop the silly jokes. When old friends reunite, there are many good topics to talk about, yet you only spout nonsense! How would I know such a lewd method?" Yue Buqun rebuffed.

"Nobody's going to believe that you don't know that nourishment method, otherwise, how do you manage to look as young as my grandson when you are actually almost sixty years old?" Mu Gaofeng said.

When Mu Gaofeng's hand moved away from his forehead, Lin Pingzhi had already jumped back several steps. He looked at the scholarly man carefully. The man had a long goatee and a neat and clean face that shined with honesty and integrity. Admiration rose from within Lin Pingzhi's heart. Hearing Mu Gaofeng calling him "Brother Yue of the Huashan Sword School" and figuring out it was this man who had just saved him, it suddenly dawned on him.

“Could this graceful man be the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, Mr. Yue? But his age is far from what I had expected. He looks like a forty-year-old man. Lao Denuo is his apprentice, but looks much older than him.” After he heard Mu Gaofeng’s comments regarding Yue’s way of staying young, he suddenly remembered what he had heard from his mother before: “When a Kung Fu master’s inner strength reaches the highest state, he can not only extend his life span, but also recover his youthful vigor.” Maybe this Mr. Yue had reached that state. His admiration grew even more.

“Brother Mu is kidding me again,” Yue Buqun said with a light smile. “Brother Mu, this young man is a dutiful son, and also a man of integrity. He is good material for an apprentice; no wonder Brother Mu likes him so much. All the trouble he has had today originated from his saving my daughter Lingshan in Fuzhou. I really could not just stand aside and do nothing. Will you please show him mercy for my sake?”

Mu Gaofeng appeared to be amazed. “What? Just with the little Kung Fu he has, he could save niece Lingshan? We probably have to reverse that; it was more likely that niece Lingshan’s sharp eyes picked out this handsome boy....”

Knowing that the hunchback was a mean and obscene person and that there probably wouldn’t be any good comments coming from his mouth, Yue Buqun quickly cut him off.

“When people from the chivalrous side encounter trouble, they help those in need. The help could be as much as risking one’s life, or as little as giving a word of advice. It doesn’t really matter how great one’s Kung Fu skills are. Brother Mu, if you are determined to take him as your apprentice, why don’t you let the young man ask permission from his parents first, and then come to submit himself to you. Wouldn’t that be a win-win solution?”

Mu Gaofeng well knew that once Yue Buqun stepped in, things would simply not go as he had wished. So he shook



his head.

"I just had a sudden impulse and wanted to take him as my apprentice. But I've lost that interest. Even if this lad kowtows to me ten thousand times now, I won't take him any more."

Out of the blue, he gave Lin Pingzhi a hard kick, which sent him into the air and sprawling twenty feet away. Yue Buqun did not expect that in any way. Mu Gaofeng had shown no sign of a sudden kick. Once his leg was extended, it was already too late to stop him. Lin Pingzhi jumped up immediately after he landed, and did not appear to have been injured.

"Brother Mu, why are you acting like a child? I'll have to say you are the one getting younger now," Yue Buqun said.

"Relax, Brother Yue," Mu Gaofeng grinned. "Although I am bold, I would never dare to offend this...this your...ha-ha...I don't even know what he's going to become of yours. See you! Good-bye! I'd never thought even the famous Huashan Sword School would be interested in the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'." He started stepping back as he spoke.

Yue Buqun took a step forward. "Brother Mu, what are you talking about?" he demanded loudly. Suddenly, his face seemed to turn a violet color. But the violet color only stayed for a brief moment before Yue's normal color returned.

Mu Gaofeng saw the color change and felt a shiver in his heart. "So that was indeed the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' of the Huashan Sword School!" he thought. "Yu Buqun has good sword skills on top of this amazing inner strength. I'd better not get into a fight with him." So he let out a grin. "I have no clue as to what that 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' is. I am only joking about it since I saw how Yu Canghai of the Qingcheng Sword School worked hard to get his hands on it. Brother Yue, please don't mind me." He turned around and walked away.

Yue Buqun watched until Mu Gaofeng disappeared into the darkness of the night. Letting out a sigh, he murmured, "People having that level of Kung Fu skills are rare in the Martial World, but he would rather abandon himself to...." He held back the word "vice" to himself and just shook his head in disappointment.

Lin Pingzhi came rushing over, knelt down in front of him and started to kowtow.

"I beg you, Master, to take me as your apprentice. I promise to follow your word of advice and obey all school rules. I will never dare to not listen to the Master's word."

"If I take you as my apprentice, Hunchback Mu will probably start a rumor saying that I robbed him of his student." Yue Buqun smiled lightly.

"As soon as I saw you, Master, I felt unspeakable admiration. It's my honest wish from the bottom of my heart to become your apprentice," Lin Pingzhi said while kowtowing nonstop.

"Very well," Yue Buqun smiled, "I'll take you. But you haven't asked permission from your parents yet. We need to find out if they agree or not."

"If I am lucky enough to become your apprentice, my parents would be very grateful. There would be no reason why they would object. The villains of the Qingcheng Sword School captured my parents. I will need Master's help in that matter," Lin Pingzhi said.

Yue Buqun nodded. "Alright! Get up! Let's go look for your parents." He turned and shouted, "Denuo, Liang Fa, and Lingshan, you can come out now."

A group of people walked out from behind the wall. Lin Pingzhi recognized them as the apprentices of the Huashan Sword School. It turned out that they had all arrived a while ago. Yue Buqun had told them to hide behind the wall, and only to come out after Mu Gaofeng had left, thus saving some face for Mu Gaofeng.

"Congratulations on taking a new apprentice, Master!" the Huashan apprentices all said cheerfully.

"Pingzhi," Yue Buqun said with a smile on his face, "you have met these senior apprentice brothers a while back in the small teashop. Now go ahead and pay your respects to them."

The old man was second senior brother Lao Denuo; the big, tall apprentice was third senior brother Liang Fa; the apprentice who had dressed as a porter was fourth senior brother Shi Daizi; the one holding an abacus was fifth senior brother Gao Genming; then there was sixth senior brother Lu Dayou. Each of these apprentices was the type not easily forgotten. Seventh senior brother Tao Jun and eighth senior brother Ying Luobai were two young apprentices. Lin Pingzhi saluted them one by one.

Giggles came from behind Yue Buqun's back. A gentle but crisp voice asked, "Daddy, am I a senior apprentice sister or a junior apprentice sister?"

In a daze, Lin Pingzhi recognized the wine-selling girl as the one called "Little Apprentice Sister" standing with all the other Huashan apprentices. She was actually the Master's daughter. Sticking her head out from behind Yue Buqun's back, showing only half of her snow-white face, she quickly glanced at Lin Pingzhi with her rolling eyes then hid back behind Yue Buqun again.

Lin Pingzhi thought, "I remember the girl in the wine shop had a very ugly pox-covered face. How did her face change?"

In the dim moonlight, he could not see the girl's face clearly when she stuck her head out and then drew it back so hurriedly, but even so, he could tell that the face was a pretty one. Then he remembered.

"She did mention that she disguised herself when she sold wine outside the town of Fuzhou. Sister Dingyi also said that she had taken on a very grotesque disguise. Obviously, she intentionally concealed her face with an ugly disguise."

"Everyone here all joined the school later than you, but they still call you Little Apprentice Sister. You are destined to be called Little Apprentice Sister, so of course it's Little Apprentice Sister again." Yue Buqun laughed.

"No way!" the girl declared with a grin. "Starting from now on, I am going to be a senior apprentice sister. Daddy, junior apprentice brother Lin will have to call me senior apprentice sister. Later when you get another one hundred or two hundred apprentices, they all have to call me senior apprentice sister."

Giggling, she walked out from behind Yue Buqun. Under the dim moonlight, Lin Pingzhi could vaguely make out a pretty oval face and a pair of bright eyes looking straight at his face. Lin Pingzhi bowed deeply.

"Senior apprentice sister Yue, I only gained Master's mercy and became an apprentice today. The one who becomes an apprentice earlier is the senior. Of course I am the junior apprentice."

Yue Lingshan was very pleased. She turned to her dad. "Daddy, he called me senior apprentice sister out of his own free will. I didn't force him."

Yue Buqun laughed. "He had just joined our school, and you are already talking about 'forcing.' He will probably think that everyone in our school is like you, the seniors forcing their wills upon the juniors. What a frightening prospect!"

All the apprentices laughed at these words.

"Daddy," Yue Lingshan said, "Big Apprentice Brother was hiding here to recover from his wounds. He was struck by that stinky Taoist Priest, and is in serious condition. Let's go find him quickly."

Yue Buqun frowned and shook his head. "Genming, Daizi, you two go carry Big Apprentice Brother out," he said.

Gao Genming and Shi Daizi answered the call in unison and both jumped into the room through the window. But soon they reported, "Master, Big Apprentice Brother is not here.

There's no one in the room." Light spilled through the window when they lit the candle in the room.

Yue Buqun frowned even more as he really did not want to enter such a disreputable place. "You," he said to Lao Denuo, "go in there and check it out."

"Yes, Master!" Lao Denuo answered and then walked toward the window.

"I'll go check too," Yue Lingshan suggested.

Yue Buqun grabbed her arm. "Nonsense! You are not allowed to go into places like this."

Yue Lingshan almost cried. "But...but Big Apprentice Brother is so badly wounded...I am afraid that he will die."

"Don't worry," Yue Buqun whispered, "he had the 'Heavenly Connecting Glue' of the Heng-Shan Sword School applied already. He won't die."

"Daddy, how...how did you know?" Yue Lingshan was both surprised and cheerful.

"Shush! Don't ask!" Yue Buqun cut her off.

Linghu Chong was already badly wounded before he took the energy blow from Yu Canghai's palm strike. After that, his wounds hurt even more, and he spat out more blood, but his mind still remained clear. He heard the arguments between Mu Gaofeng and Yu Canghai, how everybody left, and how his Master had showed up. He was a man who feared nothing except his Master. As soon as he heard his Master talking to Mu Gaofeng, thoughts of how his Master would punish him for all the mischief he had gotten into crossed his mind. The worry was so great that he even forgot about the pain from his wounds.

He turned to the bed and whispered, "A disaster is about to strike! My Master is here! Let's get out of here!" Right after these words, he staggered out the room steadying himself against the wall.

Qu Feiyan dragged Yilin from under the quilt and followed him. Seeing how Linghu Chong was teetering along and was on the verge of falling down at any second, Yilin and

Qu Feiyan both rushed over and supported him by his arms. Linghu Chong clenched his teeth and walked through the corridor. He knew that his Master had outstanding eyes and ears; the moment he walked out, the Master would know about it. Seeing a big room to the right, he immediately walked into it.

“Close...close the door and the window,” he said.

Qu Feiyan followed his instructions and shut the door and window. Linghu Chong could not maintain his composure any longer and collapsed onto the bed, breathing hard.

The three of them kept very quiet, and after a long while, they heard Yue Buqun’s voice from far away saying, “He’s not here. Let’s go!” Linghu Chong let out a long breath and felt much more relaxed.

After some time had passed, someone came into the backyard and called out in a low voice, “Big Apprentice Brother? Big Apprentice Brother!” It was Lu Dayou.

Linghu Chong thought, “Monkey Six has always been the closest to me.” He almost answered when he suddenly heard the bed-curtain shaking. It was Yilin trembling in fright when she heard somebody approaching. “If I answer Monkey Six,” Linghu Chong thought, “I could really ruin the little Sister’s reputation.” So he kept silent.

Lu Dayou walked past the window while calling “Big Apprentice Brother, Big Apprentice Brother” all the way. The calling receded further and further away, and finally faded into the night.

“Hey, Linghu Chong,” Qu Feiyan suddenly broke the silence, “are you going to die?”

“How can I die? If I die, it would really hurt the reputation of the Heng-Shan Sword School, and I’d be letting them down!” Linghu Chong answered.

“How do you figure that?” Qu Feiyan asked in surprise.

“I’ve had so much of that magical medicine of the Heng-Shan Sword School, both inside and outside. If I still can’t be

healed, I'd be letting...letting this Sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School down." Linghu Chong replied.

"Yep! If you died, you would really be letting her down!" Qu Feiyan grinned.

Knowing how seriously Linghu Chong had been wounded and seeing how he was still making jokes, Yilin admired his fortitude, but also felt a bit less stressed.

"Big Brother Linghu, you've just taken a hit from Yu Canghai. Let me see your wounds again."

Linghu Chong struggled to sit up, but Qu Feiyan said, "Never mind your manners. Lie down." Linghu Chong felt so weak that he really could not sit up, so he lay back down.

Qu Feiyan lit a candle. Yilin could see blood all over Linghu Chong's robe, so she threw aside all worry about propriety, gently lifted his long robe, and wiped off the blood around the wounds with a towel hanging by a rack. Taking the box of "Heavenly Connecting Glue" from her pocket, she applied all of the remaining medicine onto Linghu Chong's wounds.

"What a waste to put so much precious medicine on me!" Linghu Chong laughed.

"Big Brother Linghu," Yilin said, "you were badly wounded all because of me. This medicine is the least I can offer, even if...even if..." She did not know what to say, so just mumbled a little and then continued, "Even my respectful Master praised you as a young hero who is always ready to take on villains for a just cause. Because of that she even got into an argument with Master Yu."

"No need to praise me. As long as the respectful Sister doesn't scold me, I'd be completely thankful!" Linghu Chong grinned.

"Why would my Master scold you?" Yilin said. "Big Brother Linghu, just rest quietly for twenty-four hours, and if your wounds don't break open again, you should be alright." She took out another three "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pills" and helped Linghu Chong take them.

"Sis," Qu Feiyan said all of a sudden, "you stay here and keep him company. Watch out for bad guys who want to get him. My grandpa is still waiting for me. I've got to go."

"No! No!" Yilin cried out worriedly. "You cannot go. How can I stay here by myself?"

"Isn't Linghu Chong here too?" Qu Feiyan grinned. "You are not all by yourself?" She turned around and started heading out.

Yilin was greatly concerned. She jumped forth and gripped Qu's left arm. In her rush, she had used the holding technique of the Heng-Shan Sword School and grabbed Qu's arm tightly.

"Don't go!" she cried.

"Ouch! Are you trying to fight me?" Qu Feiyan chuckled.

Yilin blushed and then let go of her arm. "My good girl, please stay and keep me company," she pleaded.

"Okay, okay. Fine! I'll stay and keep you company. Linghu Chong is not a bad guy, why are you so afraid of him?" Qu Feiyan said.

"Sorry, Qu, did I hurt you?" Yilin asked while feeling less awkward.

"Nah, it doesn't hurt, but Linghu Chong seems to be hurting a lot," Qu Feiyan said.

Yilin was shocked. She immediately lifted the curtains and checked on Linghu Chong, only to find him sleeping soundly with both of his eyes shut tight. She checked Linghu Chong's breathing with her hand and could tell that its rhythm was strong and regular. Just when she was feeling a bit better, she heard Qu Feiyan's giggles and the sound of the window opening. She turned around in a hurry and saw Qu Feiyan jumping out of the window.

Yilin was astounded and felt completely lost. She walked next to the bed and called, "Big Brother Linghu? Big Brother Linghu! She...she just left." But the effect of the medicine had kicked in. Linghu Chong was completely out. He didn't hear any of Yilin's words. Yilin was very frightened and began



trembling. It took her a long while before she mustered enough strength to shut the window.

"I'd better leave soon," she thought. "What if Big Brother Linghu wakes up and then starts talking to me? What am I going to do then?" Then she thought, "He is so weak right now, even a child could kill him easily. How can I leave him and just flee the scene?"

In the dark night, the sound of dog barks occasionally echoed from the deep alleys far away. However, apart from those occasional noises, there was just dead silence. Other people from the brothel had fled a long time ago. It almost felt as if Linghu Chong, who was lying behind the bed curtain, was the only person left in the entire world beside her. Yilin sat stiffly on a chair, afraid to move. After what seemed an eternity, cock crows could be heard from all directions; it was almost dawn. Yilin began to worry again.

"It's going to be daybreak soon, and then people would be arriving. What should I do?"

She had been a Buddhist ever since she was a small child, and had always been taken care of by Sister Dingyi, so she really lacked real life experience on how to handle difficult situations. She could only worry, and had no idea what to do.

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps came from the alley outside. It seemed to be from a group of three or four people. The sound of their footsteps could be clearly heard in the stillness of dawn. They stopped in front of the Jade House's gate.

"You two search the east side. The two of us will search the west side. If anyone spots Linghu Chong, make sure you capture him alive. He is very badly wounded and won't be able to resist," a voice said.

When Yilin first heard the sound of people coming, she was terrified. Then when she heard them talking about capturing Linghu Chong, her resolve strengthened, "No matter what happens, I will protect Big Brother Linghu and

never let him fall into the bad guys' hands." As soon as she made up her mind, fear seemed to slip away and her brain started functioning again. She rushed over by the bed and pulled out the bed sheet. After quickly wrapping Linghu Chong in the sheet, she picked him up in her arms, blew out the candlelight, pushed open the door gently, and then sneaked out. She couldn't tell which direction she was going, so she just made sure she was walking in the opposite direction from which the voices came. Soon, she passed a vegetable garden and arrived at the back door. The back door was already half open. When the occupants of the brothel fled, they probably just left it open in their haste. She carried Linghu Chong out the back door and dashed along the small alley. In no time, she had reached the town wall.

"I must get out of the town. There are simply too many enemies for Big Brother Linghu here," she thought. She walked along the town wall and as soon as she reached the town gate, she dashed out.

She ran nonstop for at least three or four miles, intentionally picking small roads that led into the mountains. When there were no more roads, she found herself in a small valley. Feeling a bit relieved, she looked down at Linghu Chong and found him staring right into her eyes, a smile on his face.

Yilin almost panicked. Her arms started quivering, and Linghu Chong's body slipped out of her arms. "Oops!" she cried out and quickly bent down and extended her arms with a move called "Carry the Holy Scripture." Luckily, her reactions were quick, and she caught him before he hit the ground. But as a result, she lost her balance, and staggered a few steps before she steadied herself.

"Sorry!" she said hurriedly. "Are your wounds still hurting?"

"I am fine. Why don't you take a rest?" Linghu Chong smiled.

Yilin had completely forgotten about herself when she was running away from the Qingcheng apprentices. All she could think of was how to keep Linghu Chong out of danger. Now that they were finally safe, she felt like her body was going to fall apart. She used up her last bit of strength to put Linghu Chong down on the meadow gently, and then collapsed onto the ground panting heavily, trying to catch her breath.

"You forgot to control your breathing while you were running," Linghu Chong said with a smile. "That is a big no-no for...for us martial arts students. It makes one more likely...more likely to get hurt."

Yilin blushed slightly. "Thanks for the advice, Big Brother Linghu. My Master had taught me the same thing before, but I forgot in all the commotion." She paused for a second and then asked, "How are your wounds?"

"They don't hurt as much now, but they're just a bit itchy and numb," Linghu Chong said.

"Great! Great!" Yilin exclaimed. "When a wound gets itchy and numb, that means it's healing. I didn't expect it would start healing this fast."

Linghu Chong was quite moved seeing Yilin's joy. "It's all due to the magical medicine of your respectful school." He let out a sigh. "Too bad that we had to suffer humiliation from those low-life scoundrels because of my wounds. If we had fallen into Qingcheng's hands just now, it would be no big deal if I got killed right away, but most likely they would have tried to humiliate us even more," he said grouchy.

"So you heard everything?" Yilin asked. She felt completely embarrassed when she thought about how he could have been staring at her for the entire time she was carrying him while running away; her face reddened.

Linghu Chong didn't realize that she was actually feeling embarrassed, and thought she was just exhausted from so much running.

"Apprentice sister, why don't you do some of the breathing exercises of your school to help harmonize your inner strength, so you don't suffer any internal injuries?"

"Alright," Yilin agreed.

She sat down cross-legged and tried to work her inner strength with the breathing techniques taught by her Master. But she felt very uneasy and simply could not calm herself down to focus on the breathing exercises. Every other minute, she would glance at Linghu Chong to see if his wounds had gotten any better or worse, or if he was looking at her. At the fourth glance, her eyes happened to meet Linghu Chong's eyes. With a big shock, she immediately shut her eyes tightly. Linghu Chong, on the other hand, started laughing loudly. Yilin blushed even more and asked shyly, "Why...why are you laughing?"

"Nothing," Linghu Chong said. "You are still young and probably don't do well in the meditative exercises. If you can't calm down and get focused, then don't force yourself. Uncle-Master Dingyi must have taught you that if you work too hard on your exercises, it actually does more harm than good. This is especially true for breathing exercises; you really need to be in a calm state." He paused a moment to catch his breath, and then continued, "Don't worry! My base energy is refilling itself slowly. Even if those Qingcheng crooks come after us, there's no need to be afraid. We'll just let them demonstrate...demonstrate that 'Bum Bum Back... Back....'"

"Demonstrate the Qingcheng Sword School's 'Geese Landing in Sand' technique." Yilin smiled.

"Right!" Linghu Chong grinned. "That's good. The 'Bum Bum Back' part does not sound very graceful. Let's just call it the 'Qingcheng Sword School's Geese...Landing in Sand' technique!" After saying the last word, he had to catch his breath again.

"Don't talk too much! Take a good long nap," Yilin suggested.

“My Master is also in the town of Hengshan now! I wish I could get up right now and go to Uncle-Master Liu’s house to watch the fun,” Linghu Chong murmured.

Yilin noticed Linghu Chong’s lips were chapped and his eye sockets were also very dry. It must have been because he had lost so much blood. He badly needed to drink some water.

“Let me go find some water for you. You must be thirsty, right?” she asked.

“On our way here, I saw lots of watermelons in the field to the left. Why don’t you go get some?” Linghu Chong suggested.

“Alright.” Yilin stood up and checked her pockets, but could not find any money. “Big Brother Linghu, do you have any money with you?” she asked.

“For what?”

“For the watermelons of course!”

“Did you actually intend to pay for them?” Linghu Chong grinned. “You can just go pick some. There’s nobody living close by. The owner must be far away. Who are you going to buy from?”

“But to take without consent is...is stealing,” Yilin mumbled, “and that’s the second prohibition in the Five Prohibitions. We can’t do that. If we don’t have any money, we can beg alms from them. I am sure they will be kind enough to give us a watermelon.”

Linghu Chong became impatient. “You little....” He wanted to say “you little silly nun,” but because of her efforts on his behalf, he stopped at the word “little.”

Yilin could tell that he was disgruntled, so she dared not to say a word and simply walked in the direction they had come from looking for the watermelon field. After walking for about a mile, she did see a field several acres large and full of watermelons. Only the chirping of cicadas filled the air. There was no one around at all.

"Big Brother Linghu wanted to have some watermelon, but these watermelons all belong to someone, how can I steal from him?" she murmured to herself.

She strode down another half a mile and walked to the top of a small rise to look around, but she still could find no one, not even a shed or a hut, so she walked back to the watermelon field. Standing in the middle of the field, she hesitated for a long time before finally sticking her hands out to pick a melon, but then she pulled her hands back when she remembered the prohibition told many times by her Master, that one should never steal from others. She wanted to walk away from the field, but then Linghu Chong's thirsty face appeared in her mind. She clenched her teeth, put her palms together,<sup>41</sup> and then prayed inwardly, "Dear Buddha, I really don't want to steal. It's all because of Big Brother Linghu...Big Brother Linghu wants to eat some watermelon." But when she thought about it again, "Big Brother Linghu wants to eat some watermelon" really wasn't a great reason. She was so worried that teardrops started welling up in her eyes. She held a watermelon with both hands and then lifted it up; the stem broke easily.

"He has saved my life," she thought, "what's the big deal if I have to fall down to hell and never be reborn again? The one who commits the crime will be the one responsible. It's me, Yilin, who broke the prohibition. It has nothing to do with Big Brother Linghu." She held the watermelon in her arms and then walked back.

Linghu Chong never really took common rules and prohibitions seriously. When he heard Yilin talking about begging alms for a watermelon, he simply assumed this nun was too young and inexperienced. He had never expected the matter of getting a watermelon to be such a great moral dilemma for her. When he saw Yilin come back with the melon, he was very pleased.

"Good apprentice sister! What a well-behaved little girl!" he praised.

Yilin felt a shock in her heart when she heard how he called her, and almost dropped the watermelon. She quickly wrapped it with the front of her robe. Linghu Chong laughed.

"Why are you so worried? Was someone after you because you stole his watermelon?"

"No, no one is after me." Yilin blushed and then sat down slowly.

The sun had risen from the east; it was a sunny day. Linghu Chong and Yilin were sitting by the shady side of the mountain, and the sun had yet to reach them. All the trees around them had been washed by the recent rain and looked greener than usual. Clear and fresh air filled the valley. Yilin collected herself, and then pulled out the broken sword by her waist. Seeing the broken tip of the sword, she thought, "That villain Tian Boguang really had high Kung Fu skills. If it weren't for Big Brother Linghu risking his life to save mine, I wouldn't be sitting here in peace." She glanced at Linghu Chong from the corner of her eyes and saw a bloodless face with sunken eye sockets. "For him," she thought, "even if I have to violate more rules and break more prohibitions, I will have no regrets. To steal a watermelon is really nothing." By then, she had finally cleared all the guilt from her mind. She wiped the broken sword clean with a corner of her robe, and then sliced the watermelon open. A sweet smell quickly filled the air.

"Good melon!" Linghu Chong sniffed and then shouted. "Apprentice sister, I just remembered a joke. In the Lantern Festival earlier this year, when several fellow apprentices of our Huashan Sword School got together to drink wine, Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan composed a riddle. It went, 'A small dog on the left and a dumb melon on the right. What's the character?' At that time, sixth junior apprentice brother Lu Dayou - he's the one who was looking for me last night - was sitting to her left. I was sitting to her right."

"This riddle of hers was really making fun of you and the apprentice brother Lu." Yilin smiled.

“Right! This riddle is not hard at all. The answer is the character ‘hu’ in my name Linghu Chong.<sup>42</sup> It was an old joke that she read from a book. It just happened that sixth junior apprentice brother was sitting to her left and I was sitting to her right. And now, by coincidence, next to me, it’s a small dog on one side and a big melon on the other.” Linghu Chong pointed at the watermelon and then pointed at Yilin with a big smile on his face.

“Aha, you are really calling me a dog,” Yilin said.

She cut the melon into slices. After taking out the seeds, she handed him one. Linghu Chong took a bite. The melon was very sweet and soothing; he quickly finished it. Yilin was very delighted when she saw how he enjoyed it. Since Linghu Chong was eating while half lying down, the juice dripped all over his robe. Yilin cut the second slice into smaller pieces and handed them to him one piece at a time. Eating this way, Linghu Chong managed not to drip any more juice over himself. Seeing how his wound hurt because of the arm movements required every time he stuck his hand out to take the small pieces, she started feeding the small pieces of melon directly into his mouth. Linghu Chong consumed almost half a melon before he realized that Yilin had not had any of the melon herself.

“Have some yourself.”

“I’ll wait till you’ve had enough.”

“I’ve had enough. Go ahead and eat!”

Yilin felt thirsty, so after putting several more pieces into Linghu Chong’s mouth, she put a small one into her own mouth. Seeing that Linghu Chong stared at her without blinking, she felt shy and turned her back towards him.

“Wow, how pretty!” Linghu Chong suddenly exclaimed. His voice was filled with praise.

Yilin felt extremely embarrassed. “Why did he suddenly say I am pretty?” she thought. She felt like getting up and running away but being in two minds, she couldn’t bring herself to do so. She felt her whole body burning; even her



neck reddened because of shyness. Then she heard Linghu Chong saying, "Look, how pretty! Do you see that?"

Yilin turned slightly and saw him pointing at the west sky. She followed his finger and saw a beautiful rainbow in the distant sky extending out from behind the trees. She then realized Linghu Chong's comment "how pretty" was referring to the rainbow, and she had interpreted it in a totally different way. She felt very embarrassed, but the embarrassment now was also mixed with a little disappointment, very different from the embarrassment she felt earlier, which also had a bit of shyness and a bit of joy in it.

"Listen carefully! Do you hear that?" Linghu Chong asked.

Yilin cocked her head and listened carefully. She could vaguely hear the sound of flowing water coming from where the rainbow began.

"Sounds like a waterfall," she replied.

"Exactly! After so many days of rain, there must be waterfalls all over the valley! Let's go take a look!"

"You...you'd better just quietly rest a few more moments," Yilin suggested.

"There is only bare stone around here; so dull! I think it's better to go watch the waterfalls," Linghu Chong insisted.

Yilin did not want to go against his will, so she propped him up. She blushed when she suddenly thought: "I've had him in my arms twice. The first time was when I thought he had died. The second time was when I was fleeing from danger. Although he is still wounded badly, he is completely conscious. How can I hold him in my arms again? He is insisting on going to the waterfall. Could it be that...that he wants me...?"

While she was still hesitating, Linghu Chong had picked up a broken tree branch to use as a crutch and had started walking slowly. Seeing that, Yilin realized that she had gotten the wrong idea again.

Yilin quickly rushed over and held Linghu Chong's arm. She criticized herself inwardly, "What's wrong with me? Big Brother Linghu is a true gentleman. Why am I so capricious and always thinking weird thoughts? Maybe because I am alone with a man, and just want to protect myself? Although he and Tian Boguang are both men, one has high morals while the other has none. I really shouldn't put them into the same category."

Linghu Chong staggered along, yet was able to keep himself supported. After a few moments, they passed by a big rock. Yilin propped Linghu Chong by the rock to sit down and rest.

"Here's a nice spot too. Do you absolutely have to go over there to watch the waterfall?" she asked.

"If you say this is a good spot, I'll stay here for a while and keep you company." Linghu Chong smiled.

"Fine, fine. The scenery is better over there. If you feel happier watching the waterfall, maybe your wounds will heal faster." Yilin gave in.

Linghu Chong smiled and slowly stood up. The two slowly rounded a small pass, and were suddenly embraced by the thunder-like sound of a waterfall. After another short distance, the sound became even louder. After walking through a small wood, a waterfall appeared in front of their eyes like a white stripe hanging from the cliff above.

"We have a waterfall by the side of the Jade Maiden Peak at Mount Huashan also," Linghu Chong said cheerfully. "It's even bigger than this one. It looks similar though. Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan and I always practice our sword art skills by the waterfall. Sometimes when she gets mischievous, she will even run through the waterfall."

Yilin suddenly came to a realization when she heard the name "Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan" being mentioned the second time. "He insisted on coming to the waterfall in spite of his wounds not because he wanted to enjoy the scenery. He was thinking of his Little Apprentice Sister

Lingshan.” For some reason, she felt a great pain in her heart as if someone had just given it a hard punch.

Linghu Chong went on, “Once when we were practicing sword arts by the waterfall, she tripped and fell down, almost falling into the deep pool at the bottom. Luckily I grabbed hold of her quickly enough. That could have been one dangerous accident!”

“Do you have many apprentice sisters?” Yilin asked dryly.

“We have a total of seven female apprentices,” Linghu Chong replied, “and Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan is the daughter of Master. We all call her Little Apprentice Sister. The other six are apprentices of Master’s wife.”

“Oh, so she’s Uncle-Master Yue’s daughter. Does she... she...she get along well with you?”

Linghu Chong sat down slowly. “I am an orphan with no parents. Fifteen years ago when the respectful Master and Master-Wife took me as an apprentice out of mercy, Little Apprentice Sister was only three. I was much older than she was, so I always carried her out to pick fruits and chase rabbits. We grew up together. Master and Master-Wife don’t have a son, so they treated me like their own son. Little Apprentice Sister is just like my own sister.”

“Oh,” Yilin answered. After a short while, she said, “I am also an orphan with no parents. I was taken in by my Master and have been a nun ever since I was a child.”

“What a pity!” Linghu Chong exclaimed. Yilin turned toward him and looked at him questioningly. “If you weren’t an apprentice of Uncle-Master Dingyi,” Linghu Chong said, “I could have begged Master-Wife to take you in as an apprentice. We have lots of apprentice brothers and sisters. With twenty odd people, it’s really lively. After practices, we just play around in groups. Master and Master-Wife don’t really discipline us much. When you meet my Little Apprentice Sister, you will surely like her and be good friends with her.”

"Too bad I don't have such good luck!" Yilin said. "But in the White-Cloud Nunnery, Master and apprentice sisters are all very nice to me. I...I...am very happy too."

"Yes, yes! I didn't mean anything by my remarks! Uncle-Master Dingyi's sword skills are almost godlike. When my Master and Master-Wife speak of sword arts from different schools and styles, they always mention your respectful Master. The Heng-Shan Sword School is no less than the Huashan Sword School in any way!"

"Big Brother Linghu," Yilin said, "the other day when you said to Tian Boguang that fighting while standing up, Tian Boguang is the fourteenth best in the Martial World; Uncle-Master Yue is eighth. Then how is my Master ranked?"

Linghu Chong began laughing. "I was just fooling Tian Boguang. There isn't any ranking like that. Everyone's Kung Fu skills change every single day. Some get better, and some get worse because of old age or something else. How could someone actually rank all of them? Tian Boguang does have high Kung Fu skills, but probably not good enough to be fourteenth in the entire Martial World. I intentionally ranked him high to make him happy."

"Oh! So you were just fooling him." Yilin sat there, staring at the waterfall blankly for a while, lost in thought. Then she asked, "Do you always like to fool people?"

Linghu Chong grinned. "That depends. I wouldn't say 'always.' Some people you can fool, and some people you cannot. When my Master and Master-Wife ask me about things, of course I wouldn't dare try to fool them."

"Oh," Yilin hummed. "Then how about your fellow apprentice brothers and sisters?" She originally wanted to ask, "Do you fool your Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan?" but for some reason, she was afraid to put forth the question so boldly.

"Well, that depends on who it is, and what it's about," Linghu Chong said with a smile. "We apprentice brothers

always play jokes on each other. If we don't fool people, there would be no fun!"

"Even with apprentice sister Lingshan? You fool her too?" Yilin finally asked.

Linghu Chong had never thought about this before. He frowned and thought about it for a while. Throughout his life, he had never fooled her on important issues. So he said, "For important things, I will never fool her. If we were just playing together, then of course there would be some fooling and joking."

In the White-Cloud Nunnery, Yilin's Master did not laugh much and enforced very strict nunnery rules. The apprentice sisters also maintained cold emotionless expressions most of the time. Although fellow apprentices cared for each other, very seldom would one tell a joke, much less play jokes on each other. There were quite a few young and vivacious secular girl apprentices under Uncle-Master Dingjing and Uncle-Master Dingxian, but they rarely joked with the nun apprentices. She spent her entire childhood in loneliness and lived a quiet life. Other than breathing exercises and martial arts training, all she did was to drum on the wooden fish and read Buddhist scriptures. When she heard Linghu Chong talking about the fun shared amongst Huashan apprentices, she longed for it.

"It would be really fun if I could go with him to play at Mount Huashan," she thought. Then she figured, "After all the major disturbances I caused this time, Master surely wouldn't let me out again once we get back to the nunnery. Playing at Mount Huashan would only be wishful thinking. Even if I did go to Mount Huashan, he would be accompanying his Little Apprentice Sister all the time. I don't know anyone else, who's going to keep me company?" A sudden sadness came over her; tears almost rolled down her cheeks.

Linghu Chong did not notice. He stared at the waterfall and said, "Little Apprentice Sister and I are working on a set

of sword arts that will have moves working within the falling water. Apprentice sister, do you know what the purpose is?"

"I don't know." Yilin shook her head. Her voice choked, but Linghu Chong didn't notice that either.

"When we fight somebody," he went on, "if he has a good level of inner strength, then the fierce inner strength will be released along with his punches or weapon slashes. The inner strength, although invisible, will knock our swords away. When Little Apprentice Sister and I practiced our sword skills in the waterfall, we imagined the power of the falling water to be the inner strength from the enemy, so we not only had to block the enemy's energy attack, but also try to redirect his own inner strength back at him."

"So were you able to get it done?" seeing that Linghu Chong was in high spirits, Yilin asked.

"Nope! Nope!" Linghu Chong shook his head. "It's so hard to create a new set of sword arts! And we couldn't really create any new moves; we just modified some of the Huashan Sword Art moves we had learned from the Master to thrust in the waterfall. Even if we did come up with some new ideas, they were just for fun; it would be useless in a real fight. Otherwise, why would I be beaten up so badly by Tian Boguang?" He made a short pause while moving his hands about slowly. "I just thought of another move!" he said happily. "After I recover from my wounds, I can try it out with Little Apprentice Sister."

"What's the name of this sword art of yours?" Yilin asked gently.

"I really didn't want to have a name for it, but Little Apprentice Sister insisted on giving it one. She called it 'Chong-Ling Sword Art,' because it was created by both her and me," Linghu Chong said with a smile.

"Chong-Ling Sword Art. Chong-Ling Sword Art. Hmm, in the name of the sword art, there's your name and there's her name too. When you pass it on to later generations, everyone will know it was...was created by the two of you."

Linghu Chong laughed. "My Little Apprentice Sister said that because she's like a little child. With our incomplete understanding of martial arts, we are not qualified to create any sword arts. Don't tell this to anyone else. If others hear about this, they'd be laughing their asses off!"

"Of course, I won't tell anyone," Yilin said. She stopped for a moment and then smiled. "Actually, others have already heard about how you created your own sword art."

Linghu Chong was astounded. "Really? Did apprentice sister Lingshan tell others?" he asked.

"It was you who told Tian Boguang." Yilin grinned. "Didn't you say that you created a set of sword arts thrusting at flies while sitting down?"

Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter. "I was making things up with him. You still remember that, huh?" When he laughed loudly, the muscles around his wound moved and he grimaced with discomfort.

"Oh no! It's my entire fault! Your wounds are hurting again! Please don't speak anymore. You need to rest quietly," Yilin said.

Linghu Chong closed his eyes. But after only a short while, he opened them again. "I just thought the scenery here would be better, but now that we're by the waterfall, we can't see the rainbow any more."

"The waterfall has the beauty of a waterfall; the rainbow has the beauty of a rainbow," Yilin said.

Linghu Chong nodded. "That's absolutely right! There are no perfect things in the world. When one works so hard to go after something, once he gets it, it's no big deal anymore, but the things he had in his hands would have been lost."

"Big Brother Linghu, what you just said has profound meaning behind it. It's a pity that my understanding of Buddhism is too shallow, and cannot understand the full extent of it. If my Master heard your words, she would be able to come up with a good explanation."

“What profound meaning? What do I know? Hmm, I am tired!” Linghu Chong let out a sigh and then slowly closed his eyes. His breathing gradually slowed down and soon he fell asleep.

Yilin stayed by Linghu Chong’s side, and gently whisked about a leafy branch to drive away mosquitoes and other bugs from him. After a couple of hours, she felt tired too, and almost fell asleep. But she suddenly thought, “When he wakes up later, he will definitely get hungry. There’s not much to eat around here. Why don’t I go get a couple more watermelons? They would help satisfy our thirst and hunger.” So she strode back to the watermelon field and picked two more melons. Afraid that someone or some wild animals might bother Linghu Chong while she was away, she rushed back. Only after she saw him sleeping soundly, did she relax and sat down quietly beside him.

Linghu Chong opened his eyes. “I thought you had gone back,” he said with a smile.

“Gone back?” Yilin was surprised.

“Aren’t your Master and apprentice sisters still looking for you? They must be worried,” Linghu Chong said.

Yilin hadn’t thought about that at all. Now hearing these words, she got worried. “When I see Master again sometime later, will she be angry with me?” she wondered.

“Apprentice sister, thank you for accompanying me for so long. You have already saved my life. You should really go back now,” Linghu Chong said.

“No!” Yilin shook her head. “How can I leave you out in the middle of nowhere by yourself, with no one to take care of you?”

“When you get back to Uncle-Master Liu’s house, you can tell my junior apprentice brothers in secret. Then they will come to take care of me.”

Yilin felt really sad. “So it’s really because he wants the company of his Little Apprentice Sister; the sooner I go get her, the better,” She thought. Not able to suppress her



sadness, she began weeping; teardrops started dripping down to the ground.

Seeing her cry, Linghu Chong was surprised.

“Why...why are you crying? Are you afraid of getting punished by your Master when you get back?” he asked.

Yilin shook her head.

“Oh, I see. You are afraid to bump into Tian Boguang again. Don’t be afraid, from now on, he will only run away from you as soon as you are in sight. He will never dare approach you again,” Linghu Chong said.

Yilin shook her head again and more teardrops fell down on the ground.

Linghu Chong was confused. “Well...err...my mistake. I apologize. Little apprentice sister, don’t get mad,” he pleaded.

Hearing his gentle words, Yilin felt better, but then she thought, “He said these words in such a soft-spoken and submissive way; obviously he is used to apologizing to his Little Apprentice Sister, and now he just blurted them out without thinking.” So she blubbered and stamped her feet on the ground.

“I am not your Little Apprentice Sister. You...you...all you can remember is your Little Apprentice Sister,” she complained.

After the words were blurted out, she immediately regretted it. “I am a nun, why am I saying things like this to him? That’s very inappropriate,” she thought. Her face flushed and she turned aside.

Linghu Chong looked at her. Her face was completely red and teardrops were still rolling down her cheeks. It was almost like a small red blossom by the waterfall, its petals sprinkled with drops of water, charming and delicate. “Wow, she is so pretty. Really no less so than apprentice sister Lingshan,” he thought.

“You are much younger than I am. Our Five Mountains Sword Alliance is like ‘Same root different branches.’ We are

all apprentice brothers and sisters. Of course you are my little apprentice sister, too. Tell me how I have offended you, will you?" he said softly.

"You did not offend me. I know you want me to leave so you won't get mad at me and won't have bad luck. You said it before: one sees a nun, one loses...." She didn't even finish her sentence and just kept on sobbing.

Linghu Chong could not help but feel amused. "Aha, so she wants to get even with me for the Huiyan Wine House incident. Well, I admit I should apologize for that!" he thought.

"Linghu Chong was such a jerk and said so much nonsense. The other day in Huiyan Wine House, I said so many wrong things and offended your entire respectful school. I really should be punished!" He raised his hand and gave himself a couple of slaps in the face.

Yilin turned back in a hurry. "Don't...don't...I...don't blame you. I...I just don't want to bring you bad luck."

"Very punishable!" Linghu Chong said, and slapped himself one more time.

"I am not angry now. Big Brother Linghu, don't...don't beat yourself," Yilin said in a hurry.

"You're not angry anymore?" Linghu Chong asked. Yilin shook her head. "But you are not smiling at all. Isn't that still being angry?" Linghu Chong said.

Yilin squeezed out a smile, but out of the blue, for no reason, she felt even greater sadness overwhelm her, and could not help weeping again, so she turned away once more.

Linghu Chong suddenly let out a long sigh. Yilin slowly stopped weeping and asked quietly, "Why...why did you sigh?"

Linghu Chong laughed hard inwardly. "After all, she's just a little girl, and is falling for this trick of mine too!" he thought. He had been Yue Lingshan's companion ever since he was a child. Yue Lingshan would lose her temper now and

then and stop talking to him no matter how he coaxed her. Regardless of what he said, she would not pay any attention to him. Then Linghu Chong would put on an act to arouse her curiosity, and then get her to approach him. Yilin had never been at odds with anyone before, so of course it worked like a charm. In no time, she had fallen for his trick. Linghu Chong let out another long sigh and turned away silently.

"Big Brother Linghu, did I get you upset? It was my fault; please don't pay...pay any attention to it," Yilin said.

"No, you didn't get me upset," Linghu Chong said.

Yilin could see his worried face, but had no idea that he was actually laughing loudly inwardly and had pretended the whole thing, so she got worried.

"I got you to hit yourself. Let me...let me hit myself to make it even."

She raised her hand and slapped herself in the right cheek. Before she could slap herself again, Linghu Chong had sat up and gripped her wrist. But because of the body movement, his wound stung greatly, and he could not help but groan.

"Ah, lie...lie down quickly. Don't aggravate your wounds," Yilin said hurriedly. She helped him to lie down slowly while blaming herself, "Ah, I am so stupid. I cannot do anything right. Big Brother Linghu, is it...hurting badly?"

Linghu Chong's wound did hurt pretty badly. If it were any other time, he would never admit it. But now he had an idea. "I'll have to do such and such to get her smiling again." He scowled and let out several snorts.

Yilin was very concerned. "Hopefully it won't...won't start bleeding again," she murmured.

She felt his forehead with her hand and was pleased to find that he didn't have a fever. After a few moments, she asked gently, "Are you feeling a bit better?"

"Still hurts badly," Linghu Chong said.

Yilin pulled a long face and had no idea what to do.

“Wow, it hurts! I wish sixth...sixth apprentice brother were here,” Linghu Chong muttered.

“Why? He has special painkillers?” Yilin asked.

“Yeah! His mouth is the painkiller. I’ve been wounded pretty badly before, and was in terrible pain. Sixth apprentice brother is really good at telling jokes. When I listen to his jokes and laugh at them, I forget about the pain from my wounds completely. I really wish he were here. Ouch...woo...it really hurts...ou...ouch!”

Yilin felt that she was in an awkward position. People under Master Dingyi wore a solemn face everyday while reading Buddhist scriptures, praying to Buddha, and practicing martial arts. It was very rare in the White-Cloud Nunnery to actually hear any laughter. For her to tell a joke was almost against her nature. She thought, “Apprentice brother Lu Dayou is not here, and Big Brother Linghu wants to hear some jokes, I guess I’ll have to tell the jokes, but... but...I don’t know any jokes.” A sudden idea popped into her head and she remembered something.

“Big Brother Linghu, I don’t know how to tell jokes, but I’ve read a book of scripture in our Scripture Room that seemed to be interesting. It’s called the ‘Scripture of Hundred Parables.’ Have you read it before?”

Linghu Chong shook his head. “Nope. I never read any books, especially Buddhist scriptures.”

Yilin blushed slightly. “I am so stupid to ask such a foolish question. You are not a Buddhist; of course you don’t read Buddhist Scriptures.” She paused and then went on, “The book ‘Scripture of Hundred Parables’ was written by a great Indian monk named Gazena. There are many interesting stories in the book.”

“Great! I love interesting stories. Tell me some!” Linghu Chong encouraged her.

Yilin smiled as countless of stories flashed through her memory. “Ok, let me tell you the parable of the ‘Plough Breaking Head.’ A long time ago, there was this bald headed

man. He was naturally bald, and didn't have a single hair on his head. For some reason, he got into an argument with a farmer. The farmer had a plough in his hands, so he took the plough and struck the bald man's head. That blow broke the skin of the man's head and it started bleeding, but the bald man only laughed and took the abuse without dodging. Bystanders felt it very strange and asked him why he didn't dodge the attack but rather laughed at it. The bald man said with a big smile, 'That farmer is so dumb that when he did not find any hair on my head, he thought it was a rock, and then proceeded to use his plough to break the rock. If I dodged, wouldn't I be agreeing that he was the smart one?'"

Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter. "Wonderful story!" he exclaimed. "That bald man was a real character! Even if he has to lose his life taking a beating, he shouldn't budge."

Seeing Linghu Chong's happy face, Yilin felt great contentment. "Let me tell you another one called the parable of the 'Doctor Making Princess Grow Up'," she said. "Once upon a time, a king had a daughter. The king was a very impatient man. Seeing that the princess was just a little baby, he really wanted her to grow up fast. One day, he called upon the royal doctor and ordered him to make a special kind of medicine for the princess, so that when the princess took the medicine, she would grow up immediately. The royal doctor said, 'It is possible to make such special medicine, but to collect all the ingredients and to refine them would require a lot of work. Please let me take the princess home and work on the medicine immediately. I will try to get it done as fast as I can, but your majesty cannot press me.' The king said, 'Fine, I won't press you.' The royal doctor carried the princess back to his own home and then started reporting to the king everyday that he was working on getting the ingredients and refining them. Twelve years went by. The royal doctor then reported to the king, 'I have finished making the special medicine and the princess took

the medicine today.’ He brought the princess to the king. The king was very pleased to see that the little baby had grown into a slim and graceful young girl. He praised the royal doctor’s excellent skills since right after taking the special medicine his daughter did grow up. So he granted him great quantities of gold and jewels.”

Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter again. “You said the king was an impatient man,” he said, “but he was actually not impatient at all. Didn’t he wait twelve years? If I were the royal doctor, I would only need one day to change the baby princess into a seventeen year old slim and graceful young girl.”

Yilin stared at Linghu Chong with her eyes wide open. “How would you manage that?” she asked.

Linghu Chong grinned. “Apply ‘Heavenly Connecting Glue’ dressing outside and take ‘White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pills’ inside.”

“Those are medicines for cuts and bruises, how can they make one grow taller and older?” Yilin asked, laughing.

“That’s right. After I carry the baby princess back home, I’d get four tailors....”

“Why would you get four tailors?” Yilin was even more confused.

“For making new dresses, of course.” Linghu Chong replied. “I’d have them measure your size and make a set of royal gowns the same night. The second morning, after you put them on, with an exquisite phoenix coronet on your head, a silk skirt with a hundred flower patterns, and a pair of slippers embroidered with golden thread and decorated with pearls on your feet, you can gracefully walk into the palace. First you call his majesty three times, then bow down to salute while saying, ‘My royal father, after I took the royal doctor Linghu Chong’s magical medicine, I grew up in one single night.’ When the king sees such a beautiful and lovely princess, he will burst with so much joy that he would never bother to check if you were real or not. Then, I, the royal

doctor Linghu Chong, would of course get a handsome reward!"

Yilin giggled uncontrollably while listening to Linghu Chong. When he finally finished, she laughed so hard that she had to bend down and could not straighten herself up. After laughing for a long while, she said, "You are definitely smarter than the royal doctor in the 'Scripture of the Hundred Parables.' Too bad that I...I am so ugly, and don't look like a princess at all."

"If you are ugly, then there is nobody who could call themselves pretty in this world. In all the ages, there must have been tens of thousands of princesses, but none can compare with you," Linghu Chong said.

Yilin was overjoyed to hear him complimenting her so earnestly. "Did you meet all those tens of thousands of princesses?" she asked with a smile.

"Of course! I checked them out one by one in my dreams," Linghu Chong said.

"Hey, why do you always dream about princesses?" Yilin grinned.

Linghu Chong chuckled and said, "When one thinks too much...." He suddenly remembered that Yilin was only an innocent and artless young nun. By joking with him, she had already violated her vows, how could he still carry on with her without any consideration? When he thought of that, he immediately became serious and faked a yawn.

"Ah, Big Brother Linghu, you must be tired. You should close your eyes and nap for a while," Yilin said.

"Yes! Your jokes really worked magic. My wounds are not hurting anymore," Linghu Chong said.

He had wanted Yilin to tell jokes so she would stop crying and smile again. Now that she was smiling, his goal had been accomplished, so he slowly closed his eyes.

Yilin sat by his side and gently whisked the branch again to drive away bugs. The sound of croaking frogs could be heard from streams in the distance almost like a sweet

lullaby. Yilin started feeling fatigued. Her eyelids were getting heavier and heavier; she couldn't keep her eyes open and finally dozed off into her own dream world.

In the dream, she wore the beautiful dress of a princess and walked into a magnificent palace. A handsome young man by her side held her hand, and he seemed to vaguely resemble Linghu Chong. Then the two of them started floating into the air and above the clouds. She just felt unspeakable joy and fulfillment. Suddenly an old nun ran after them, scowling, with a sword in her hand. It was Master! Yilin was shocked! She heard her Master yelling, "You dirty little swine, you not only didn't follow the rules of the nunnery, but dared to be a princess, and mix around with this loafer!" Master grabbed her arm while yelling and started pulling insistently. Instantly, everything fell into complete darkness. Linghu Chong disappeared, and Master also disappeared, leaving her falling through the heavy dark clouds. Yilin screamed in fear, "Big Brother Linghu, Big Brother Linghu!" Her entire body became weak and she could neither move her arms nor her legs. Not able to struggle, she screamed even more and suddenly found herself waking up from the nightmare and being stared at by Linghu Chong, his eyes wide open. Yilin blushed. "I...I...", she mumbled shyly.

"Did you have a nightmare?" Linghu Chong asked.

Yilin's face blushed again. "I am not sure." Then with a quick glance, she found that Linghu Chong had an unusual expression on his face; it seemed as though he was trying to endure some severe pain.

"Your...your wounds are hurting badly?" she asked hurriedly.

"It's no big deal," Linghu Chong said, but his voice was shaking. Soon, big drops of sweat beaded on his forehead. Yilin could easily tell that he was in great pain.

Yilin was very worried and kept asking herself, "What should I do? What should I do?"



She took out a handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his brow. When her little fingers brushed Linghu Chong's forehead, it felt as if she had just touched a piece of burning coal. She once heard from her Master that when a person was wounded by knife or sword cuts and became feverish it would be very dangerous. Out of desperation, she started reciting Buddhist scriptures.

"For all living creatures, when trouble happens, if he calls Bodhisattva Guanyin's name with absolute faith, then Bodhisattva Guanyin<sup>43</sup> would hear him and help him out of trouble. If the one calling Bodhisattva Guanyin's name were trapped in a big fire, fire would not be able to burn him, all because of the holy power of the Bodhisattva. If he were washed away by big waves, then when he calls Bodhisattva's name, he would drift to a shallow spot...."

The scriptures were from the 'Scripture of Magical Power from Bodhisattva Guanyin.' At the beginning, her voice was still trembling, after a while, she gradually calmed down. Hearing Yilin's melodious voice getting calmer and calmer, Linghu Chong could tell that she had full faith in the magic power of the scripture.

She continued, "If one were about to be murdered, and he calls Bodhisattva Guanyin's name, the murderer's knife and staff would break into pieces, thus protecting him from danger. If demons came to bother people, one can call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name, then the demons wouldn't be able to see him, let alone hurt him. If one has shackles around his body, no matter whether he is guilty or not, if he calls Bodhisattva Guanyin's name, then all shackles would break loose and fall to the ground, he can then be freed from the restrain...."

Linghu Chong felt his amusement grow at these words and eventually let out a chuckle.

"What...what's so funny?" Yilin asked in surprise.

"If I had known that, I wouldn't have to learn Kung Fu," Linghu Chong quipped. "If a villain or my personal enemy

wanted to kill me, all I...I would need to do is to call upon Bodhisattva Guanyin's name and the villain's knife would break to pieces, and I would remain safe...safe and sound."

"Big Brother Linghu, don't be disrespectful to the Bodhisattva," Yilin remonstrated. "If I don't recite the scriptures with my full heart and faith, it would not work."

She went on, "If fierce beasts surrounded you and you were frightened by their sharp teeth and claws, you could call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name, and all the beasts would quickly leave. When you see venomous serpents and scorpions, you can call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name and praise her holy power, then they will go back to their lairs. When lightening and thunders strike the ground and hail and heavy rain start pouring down, one can call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name and praise her holy power so that the bad weather would stop and disappear. For all living creatures, there are so many difficulties, but the holy and wonderful power from Bodhisattva Guanyin will help us get through all of them...."

Linghu Chong could hear the sincerity in her voice. Although her voice was low, she was really praying for help with all her heart and had full faith in Bodhisattva Guanyin. It seemed that she had opened her whole heart to the Bodhisattva and was supplicating and praying from deep within her heart for the Bodhisattva to show her magical power and stop Linghu Chong from suffering. She was almost saying, "Bodhisattva Guanyin, I beg you to take away all the pain and suffering from Big Brother Linghu and transfer it all to me. You can change me into a swine, or send me to hell, but please alleviate Big Brother Linghu's misery...."

Later on, Linghu Chong could no longer discern her words, only the sound of her praying, so sincere and earnest. Unbidden tears filled Linghu Chong's eyes. He lost his parents when he was just a child. Master and Master-Wife took good care of him, but because he was always naughty and mischievous, they gave him more punishment than kind

affection; among his fellow apprentices, every one respected the Big Apprentice Brother, and dared not to go against his wishes. Little Apprentice Sister Lingshan was close to him, but had never shown such care and selfless affection that would accept all manner of misery in exchange for his safety and joy. Feelings of gratitude welled up in his chest; in his eyes, the little nun seemed to have a holy halo around her body.

Yilin's prayers became softer and softer; in her vision, there seemed to be a real Bodhisattva Guanyin standing in front of her, waving a willow branch and spreading dew to help the needy and relieve the distressed. And every call to the Bodhisattva was a direct plea to ask for mercy for Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong's heart was filled with gratitude and peace, and soon he fell asleep to the gentle and faithful sound of the scriptures.

# **Chapter 6: Hand-Washing**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**With a bright smile on his face, Liu Zhengfeng rolled up his sleeves and got ready to put his hands into the golden basin, when suddenly someone shouted sharply outside, “Stop!”**

After Yue Buqun took Lin Pingzhi as his new apprentice, the Huashan group, led by Yue Buqun, arrived at the Liu House. When Liu Zhengfeng heard the news from his servants, he was overwhelmed by both surprise and joy – even the world renowned “Gentleman Sword” in the Martial World, Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, came himself. Wasting no time, he rushed to the door to greet, expressing his gratitude again and again. Yue Buqun appeared to be very polite and modest. After congratulating Liu Zhengfeng with a big smile, he entered the gate with Liu Zhengfeng abreast. Priest Tian-Men, Sister Dingyi, Yu Canghai, Mr. Wen, and He Sanqi all greeted at the door of the hall.

Yu Canghai had his own interpretation. He thought to himself, “Liu Zhengfeng certainly does not have the kind of fame that will get the Head Master of Huashan Sword School to come himself. Yue Buqun must have come for me. Humph! The Five Mountains Sword Alliance does outnumber me here, but my Qingcheng Sword School is not easy to be trifled with either. If Yue Buqun starts to criticize me, I’ll cut him off and question him about Linghu Chong sleeping with prostitutes. When it comes down to blows, we’ll just have to fight it out.” But when Yue Buqun saw him, Yue just bowed down like how he did to all the others and greeted.

“Master Yu, long time no see. You are even in better shape now.”

“Mr. Yue, how are you?” Yu Canghai bowed back.

After the masters exchanged some short chats, more guests showed up at the gate. This was the day set for Liu Zhengfeng’s “Gold Basin Hand Washing” ceremony. At one hour before noon, Liu Zhengfeng went back to the inner rooms to prepare himself for the ceremony, while his apprentices took over the tasks of catering the guests.

Close to noon, over five hundred more guests from distant locations flooded in. Among the guests, there was Vice-Chief of the Beggars Clan – Zhang Jin’ao, Master Xia of Zhengzhou Six Harmonies Style Studio together with his three sons-in-law, Granny Tie from the Holy Maiden Peak of the Three-Gorges, Chief of the Sea-Sand Clan from the East Sea – Pang Roar, the Dual of the River Qu – Magic Blade, Bai Ke, and Magic Brush, Lu Xisi. Some of them had known each other before, and some had only heard about each other’s names, never having the chance to meet. The Big Hall soon was filled with greetings and chats, almost sounding like a big marketplace.

Priest Tian-Men and Sister Dingyi stayed inside their rooms to rest, not bothering going out to greet the crowd. They both thought, “Among the guests here today, some have good reputations in the Martial World, but some others are obviously people with doubtful characters. Liu Zhengfeng is a Master of the Hengshan Sword School. Why doesn’t he conduct himself with dignity, instead, associating himself with all kinds of people indiscriminately? Wouldn’t that lower the reputation of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance?” Yue Buqun, on the other hand, was very fond of making friends. Even when many nobodies or even people with not-so-good reputations came by to chat with him, he always chatted and joked with them without any arrogant posture as the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School – a famous one in the Martial World.

Meanwhile, directed by apprentices of the Liu House, the servants had set up over two hundred banquet tables inside and outside the Big Hall. Liu Zhengfeng’s relatives, subordinates, bookkeepers, and apprentices including Xiang Dorian and Mi Weiyi started seating the guests. Based on the fame and seniority in the Martial World, Priest Tian-Men, the Head Master of the Taishan Sword School, should be seated at the head of the table, but since the five Sword Schools were all part of the Sword Alliance, Priest Tian-Men, Yue

Buqun, and Sister Dingyi were all half-hosts as well, so it wouldn't be appropriate for them to be seated in the seats of honor. Other senior masters all yielded to each other; no one wanted to sit at the head of the table.

Suddenly two shots of blunderbuss came from outside the gate, then strains of music accompanied by drumbeats followed, together with sound of gongs clearing the way.<sup>44</sup> Apparently, some kind of a government official had just arrived at the gate. While the guests were still in surprise, Liu Zhengfeng rushed out in his brand new silk robe from the inner room. All the guests started congratulating and cheering for him, but Liu Zhengfeng only put out a brief salute, and walked straight out. A few moments later, he walked back in accompanying a government official in government uniform respectfully.

All the guests were stunned. "Is that official a first-class master in the Martial World?" Although his uniform looked very impressive, his sleepy eyes and unhealthy complexion all indicated that he did not have any martial arts skills. Yue Buqun and the bunch all thought, "Liu Zhengfeng is a very wealthy man in the town of Hengshan, of course he would be making friends with the local government officials. Since today is the day of great rejoicing for Liu Zhengfeng, it would be no surprise for a local official to come by and congratulate out of perfunctory."

The official walked straight into the hall and stopped in the middle. A subordinate of his knelt down on his right leg and raised the tray in his hands high above his head. The tray was covered by a piece of yellow satin with a scroll in the middle. The official bent slightly to pick up the scroll and shouted loudly, "The Imperial Decree is here! Liu Zhengfeng, greet the Imperial Decree!"

All the guests were astonished! "Liu Zhengfeng's hand-washing and giving up using his sword were purely events only related to the Martial World. What has that got to do with the imperial government? Why did the emperor send an



Imperial Decree? Could Liu Zhengfeng have plotted against the imperial government and was found guilty? That would be a crime punishable by beheading everyone in the whole family." Soon, everyone had reached the same conclusion and stood up. Some impatient ones had already grabbed their weapons. Everyone thought that since this official was announcing the Imperial Decree, then soldiers must have surrounded Liu House in all directions, and a big fight had become inevitable. As friends of Liu Zhengfeng, no one would be standing by unconcerned. In addition, when a nest got demolished, no eggs would escape unbroken; by coming to the event at Liu House, one had already become accessory of the rebels. It was already too late to stay aloof from the affair anyway. Everyone waited for Liu Zhengfeng's signal. As soon as he started yelling, all the blades in the Big Hall would chop the official into ten thousand pieces in no time. But Liu Zhengfeng appeared to be very calm and relaxed. He knelt down in front of the official, and after three kowtows, he said loudly, "Liu Zhengfeng greets the Imperial Decree. Thanks to his great Majesty!" All guests were stunned.

The official opened the scroll and started reading. "His great Majesty said: According to the report from Governor of Hunan Province, civilian Liu Zhengfeng of Hengshan County, who is zealous for the common weal and possesses good skills in horse-riding and archery, is worth of government services. Now you will be promoted to the rank of a Sergeant. From now on, you will render your service to the Imperial Court with no reservation to repay the Majesty's kindness. His Majesty!"

"Liu Zhengfeng thanks for his Majesty's great kindness. Thanks to his great Majesty!" Liu Zhengfeng answered while kowtowing several more times. He stood up and then bowed to the official. "Many thanks for the patronization from your Excellency Zhang!" Liu Zhengfeng exclaimed.

"Congratulations! Congratulations! Sergeant Liu, we are both serving for his Majesty now. You are being too modest!"

The official stroked his goatee with a smile.

"I am just a reckless man of the bush," Liu Zhengfeng said. "Today I am being promoted by the Imperial Court, of course that attributes to the great kindness of his Majesty, bringing honors to all my ancestors, but that also attributes to the outreaching patronization of the Governor's Excellency and your Excellency Zhang."

"Not really. Not really," the official said with a smile.

"Brother Fang, where are the gifts for his Excellency Zhang?" Liu Zhengfeng turned to Fang Qianju.

"They are all here." Fang Qianju turned around and took out a round tray. A brocade wrapped package lay in the middle of the tray.

Liu Zhengfeng took the tray with both of his hands. "Here are some small gifts, just to show a small portion of our respect. Please accept them, your Excellency!" he said with a big smile.

"We are all brothers, there's really no need for gifts." The Zhang-named official grinned while tipping his subordinate a wink. The subordinate by his side immediately stepped forward and took the tray. As soon as the tray was handed over, his arms lowered. Obviously the package in the tray was something heavy. It had to be gold, not silver.

Beaming with joy, the Zhang-named official excused himself, "Bro, I still have government duties to take care of. I really shouldn't stay any longer. Come, let's fill three cups of wine and congratulate Sergeant Liu's promotion today. Wish him more promotions in the near future, and enjoy his Majesty's kindness once more." The servants had already prepared the wine. The Zhang-named official drank all three cups of wine swiftly, and then cupped his palms for a salute and walked out of the gate. Liu Zhengfeng walked him all the way out with heaps of smiles on his face. Gong sounds rose again, and shots of blunderbuss were set off by Liu House again to see the official off.

This scene was really not expected by any of the guests. They all just stared at each other, not knowing what to say. Everyone's face was covered by embarrassment and surprise.

Although the guests that came to Liu House were neither from the dark side of the Martial World, nor rebellions, they all had some fame in the Martial World and considered themselves the type with exceptional abilities that would look down upon local governments. When they saw how Liu Zhengfeng curried favor with the powerful, and acted so nauseatingly just for the promotion to Sergeant such a low rank from the emperor, and even bribed the official in public, some couldn't help showing disgusts on their faces. Some elder guests all thought, "He probably bought his promotion. How much gold and silver would he have to spend to get the recommendation from the Governor? Liu Zhengfeng was a man of integrity, why would he let covetousness overcome him and buy a title so unscrupulously?"

Liu Zhengfeng walked back to his guests with a big smile and invited everyone to be seated. Since no one wanted to sit at the head of the table, the armchair in the middle was left empty. Seated at the head seat by the left was Master Xia of Six Harmonies Style Studio, the oldest one among the group, and seated at the head seat by the right was the Vice-Chief of the Beggars Clan, Zhang Jin'ao. Zhang Jin'ao, himself, did not have any outstanding fame, but since the Beggars Clan is the largest clan in the Martial World, and the Chief of the Beggars Clan, Xie Feng, had outstanding martial arts skills and fame, so everyone showed their respect.

After everyone was seated, servants brought out various dishes and wines. Mi Weiyi took out a tea table covered by brocade. Xiang Danian held a shining gold basin in his arms. The basin was already filled with water. Three shots of blunderbuss came from outside, followed by eight loud "bangs" from firecrackers. All the junior apprentices at the Back Hall and the Flower Hall all rushed into the Big Hall to see the fun. Liu Zhengfeng stepped to the middle of the hall

with a bright smile and bowed to all directions with his palms cupped. All the guests stood up to salute him back.

“All the senior heroes, good friends and young friends,” Liu Zhengfeng said in a loud voice, “thank you for coming such a long way. You really have given Liu Zhengfeng great due respect. I truly appreciate that! After today’s Gold Basin Hand Washing, I will no longer be involved in the Martial World. You probably have all seen the reason why. Thanks to the great kindness of the Imperial Court, I have been awarded a small government post. As the saying goes: On his Majesty’s payroll, then show his Majesty your loyalty. In the Martial World, people do things following the code of brotherhood, but to fulfill government duties, one has to follow the laws and regulations of the government to show loyalty to his Majesty. When there is a conflict between the two, it would put me in a very awkward position. Starting from now on, Liu Zhengfeng will be quitting the Martial World. If my apprentices want to submit themselves to other schools or clans, it’s totally up to their own decisions. I invited all you friends here to be my eyewitnesses. Later when you come to the town of Hengshan again, you are still good friends of mine, but regarding the various kinds of dispute and clash in the Martial World, I will have to excuse myself.” He bowed again after the words.

All the guests had expected those words out of him. “He really wanted to be a government official. That’s his own will, and no one can force him to give that up. He has never offended me; I guess I’ll just pretend there’s no more Liu Sir in the Martial World,” they all thought.

“Such a behavior would really hurt Hengshan Sword School’s fame, no wonder the Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School, Great Mr. Mo, did not show up. He must be quite mad about it,” some also thought.

“The Five Mountains Sword Alliance has done many chivalrous acts recently, and is well respected by everyone. Now with such a behavior from Liu Zhengfeng, people

probably won't say anything up front, but behind the scenes, there might be all kinds of comments," some others thought.

There were also people who took pleasure out of the scene, thinking, "And the people of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance still call themselves a chivalrous group? As soon as he has a chance to gain promotion and get rich, he kowtows to an official in such a begging manner. How could that be called chivalrous?"

These thoughts boggled each of the guests' minds. In the meantime, silence swept the entire Big Hall. Under such circumstance, everyone should have already congratulated Liu Zhengfeng, and complimented with something like "Retire with happiness and a long life," "Great courage and great wisdom," etc. etc., but with over a thousand guests around, none said a word.

Liu Zhengfeng turned to face the outside and said loudly, "Thanks for the respectful Master's kindness, I, Liu Zhengfeng, was taken as an apprentice of the Hengshan Sword School, and was taught martial arts skills. I am very ashamed that I could not expand the fame of the Hengshan Sword School. Luckily, our school still has apprentice brother Mo to manage things. Liu Zhengfeng is just mediocre in the school. The school wouldn't miss anything without me. Starting from now on, after I wash my hands in the gold basin, I will be focusing on my governmental career. I will never use the martial arts skills I learned from my Master to work toward my promotion. Regarding disputes and clashes in the Martial World, or arguments between schools and clans, Liu Zhengfeng will never be involved again. If I ever break my promise, I will end up like this sword."

He turned his right palm over and drew a long sword from under his robe. Bending the sword slightly with his hands, "Crack," he had broken the blade into two pieces. He simply let the two broken parts fall to the floor, and the broken blades pinned into the green brick on the floor without any noise.

Seeing the scene, everyone was well shaken. The broken blade had penetrated the brick so quietly; apparently, the sword had an extraordinarily sharp blade. For someone like Liu Zhengfeng, to break a normal steel sword with one's hands was nothing extraordinary, but to break such an outstanding sword so effortlessly, the strength required from one's fingers could only come from someone who had the skills of an elite fighter in the Martial World.

"What a pity!" Mr. Wen gave out a deep sigh. No one was clear if he was feeling sorry because of the loss of such an outstanding sword, or because such a great master as Liu Zhengfeng would willingly barter away his honor for the government's patronage.

With a bright smile on his face, Liu Zhengfeng rolled up his sleeves and got ready to put his hands into the golden basin, when suddenly someone shouted sharply outside, "Stop!"

Slightly surprised, Liu Zhengfeng looked up and saw four men in yellow robes walking through the gate. After entering the gate, the four split into groups of two and stood still on each side of the path, when a tall man, also in a yellow robe, walked straight in with his head held high and a silk flag in five colors raised high in his hand. The flag was studded with pearls and diamonds, so when the flag flapped, magnificent twinkles flashed.

While in shock, many guests recognized the silk flag: "It's the Five Mountains Sword Alliance Chief's Command Flag!"

The man walked until he was right in front of Liu Zhengfeng, and then raised the flag high in the air. "Uncle-Master Liu, here's Five Mountains Sword Alliance Chief Zuo's order: Please temporarily postpone the ceremony of Uncle-Master Liu's 'Gold Basin Hand Washing'," he announced.

Liu Zhengfeng bowed to the flag. "May I ask why Alliance Chief would give such an order?" he asked.

"I am just following my orders. I really don't know the reason behind Alliance Chief's decision. Will you, Uncle-Master Liu, please pardon me?" the man answered.

"You are being too modest! Nephew apprentice, you must be 'Ten Thousand Feet Pine' Nephew Shi, am I right?" he asked. Although he had a smile on his face, his voice had already slightly trembled. Obviously, even as one who had experienced many confrontations, he was greatly shocked because of the sudden change.

The man was none other than the apprentice of the Songshan Sword School, "Ten Thousand Feet Pine" Shi Dengda. Realizing that Liu Zhengfeng knew about his name and nickname, he was immensely proud.

"Apprentice Shi Dengda here shows his respect to Uncle-Master Liu," he said, bowing slightly.

Taking a few steps forward, he also saluted Priest Tian-Men, Yue Buqun, Sister Dingyi, and the bunch. "Apprentice of Songshan Sword School here shows his respect to Uncle-Masters." The other four men in yellow also bowed to salute.

Sister Dingyi was quite pleased. "It's great that your Master decided to step in and stop this ceremony," she said while slightly bowing back. "All we martial people care about is the virtue of chivalry. I think one should just enjoy the Martial World leisurely and carefree; why bother becoming a government official? But I knew brother Liu had everything arranged already and would never have listened to the old nun, me, so I simply decided to save my breath."

Liu Zhengfeng said with a solemn face, "In the old days when our five sword schools formed the alliance, we agreed to help each other when attacking or attacked upon, to uphold justice in the Martial World as a whole. When there are matters related to the five schools, we should all follow the Alliance Chief's command. Our five schools made this five-colored Command Flag together. It is true that when seeing the Command Flag, it's like seeing the Alliance Chief himself, but today's 'Gold Basin Hand Washing' ceremony is

only my private matter. It is neither against any martial rules, nor related to the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, so I am not restricted by the Alliance Chief's Command Flag. Nephew Shi, please tell your respectful Master that I will not follow the order and ask for his pardon." He walked toward the gold basin.

Shi Dengda rushed forward and blocked in front of the gold basin.

"Uncle-Master Liu, my Master urged me again and again to ask Uncle-Master you to temporarily postpone your 'Gold Basin Hand Washing' ceremony. Master said that the Five Mountain Sword Alliance has the same root with different branches; we members are like brothers to each other. By sending out this Command Flag with the order, he was not only taking the inter-school relationship into consideration, but also to uphold the justice in the Martial World, and also for the good of Uncle-Master Liu," he exclaimed while raising the silk flag even higher in the air.

"I am a bit confused here," Liu Zhengfeng said. "The invitation for my Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony was sent to Mount Songshan with great manners way ahead of time. A long letter was also sent together to apprentice brother Zuo explaining everything in detail. If apprentice brother Zuo really had such good intentions, why didn't he stop me earlier, and waited till now to stop me with the Command Flag? Obviously he wants me to go back on my words in front of all the heroes in the Martial World, so I would be laughed at by every martial people!"

"Master said that Uncle-Master Liu is a man of iron will in the Hengshan Sword School, with righteousness as broad as the sky and well respected by all fellow martial people. Master himself well admires you as well, so he exhorted us to never act with impoliteness, or to face strict punishment. Uncle-Master Liu, you have great fame spreading around the Martial World, so there's really no worry regarding that," Shi Dengda said.



“Chief Zuo was flattering me. I don’t have such great fame.” Liu Zhengfeng smiled.

Seeing that neither would give in, Sister Dingyi couldn’t help cutting in.

“Brother Liu, why don’t you just postpone it for a little while? Everybody here today is a good friend of yours; who would be laughing at you? Even if there are really a few jerks that are bold enough to ridicule you, you don’t have to worry about it, because I won’t let them get off.” She glanced at everyone’s face challengingly to see who was going to be so bold to offend her fellow master in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance.

Liu Zhengfeng nodded. “Well, since Sister Dingyi also said so, let’s postpone my Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony till noon tomorrow. All of my good fiends, please stay one more day in the town of Hengshan, and wait for me to discuss this more with these nephew apprentices of the Songshan Sword School.”

Suddenly, a girl’s shouting voice came from the direction of the inner rooms. “Hey, back off! What are you doing? Who I want to play with is none of your business!”

Stunned, everyone recognized her voice. It was the young girl Qu Feiyan who confronted Yu Canghai the day before.

A man’s voice rose, “Sit down tight and shut up. I will let you go later.”

“Huh, how strange! Is this your home? Why are you blocking sister Liu and I from going to the back garden to catch butterflies?” Qu Feiyan’s voice rose again.

“Fine! If you want to go, go by yourself. Miss Liu has to stay here for a while,” the man answered.

“Sis Liu thinks you are disgusting! Why don’t you just go away and leave us alone? Sister Liu doesn’t even know you,” Qu Feiyan snapped.

Another girl’s voice came, “Sister, let’s go. Don’t pay any attention to him.”

“Miss Liu, please stay here for a while,” the man ordered.

Liu Zhengfeng’s anger started growing. “Which jerk is being bold enough to cause trouble in my house and tease my Jing’er?” he thought.

Second senior apprentice of Liu House, Mi Weiyi, rushed into the inner rooms toward the direction of the voices and saw his apprentice sister, hand in hand with Qu Feiyan, standing in the courtyard, while a young man in a yellow robe extended his arms and blocked their way. From the robe the young man was wearing, Mi Weiyi recognized him as an apprentice of the Songshan Sword School. With anger, he faked a cough and said loudly, “Are you an apprentice brother of the Songshan Sword School? Why didn’t you take a seat in the Big Hall?”

“No need for that. I am following Alliance Chief’s order to keep an eye on Liu’s family members, and not to let anyone get away,” the man said arrogantly. His voice was not loud, but it had a clear tone of haughtiness. From his words, all the guests were stunned.

Liu Zhengfeng’s anger exploded. “What’s all this about?” he questioned Shi Dengda.

“Apprentice brother Wan, you can come out now. Watch your words; Uncle-Master Liu has already agreed to stop the Hand Washing ceremony,” Shi Dengda urged.

“Yes. That would be the best,” the man in the inner room answered. He entered the Big Hall from the inner room and bowed to Liu Zhengfeng. “Songshan apprentice Wan Daping here shows his respect to Uncle-Master Liu.”

Liu Zhengfeng’s body trembled from of anger. “How many Songshan apprentices are here today? Why don’t you all show yourselves now?” he yelled.

Right after his last word, voices of dozens of people suddenly answered in unison from above the roof, outside of the gate, around the corner of the hallway, in the backyard, and all other directions, “Sure. Songshan apprentices show their respect to Uncle-Master Liu.” The shouting of dozens of

voices came at the exact same moment, loudly and unexpectedly. That really caught all the guests in the Big Hall completely off guards. The dozen people standing on the roof were all in yellow robes, but the others in the Big Hall each dressed differently, and obviously had sneaked into the Big Hall a while back to keep watch on Liu Zhengfeng in secret. They mixed themselves in the over one thousand guests, and no one had suspected them at all.

Sister Dingyi was the first one to lose her calmness. "What...what's this about? This is too much!" she called out.

"Please excuse us, Uncle-Master Dingyi," Shi Dengda explained. "Our Master gave the specific order that we should stop Uncle-Master Liu's hand washing ceremony at all costs. We were afraid that Uncle-Master Liu wouldn't follow the order, so had to give offense. Please pardon us."

Right at that moment, over a dozen people walked out from the inner rooms. They were Liu Zhengfeng's wife, his two young children, and seven apprentices of the Liu House, each with a Songshan apprentice behind holding a dagger against each one's back.

"Dear friends," Liu Zhengfeng said loudly, "Liu Zhengfeng is not someone who would cling obstinately to his course, but today with such intimidation from apprentice brother Zuo, if I have to bend my will because of force, my reputation will be ruined, then why should I even live? Apprentice brother Zuo will not allow me to have my Gold Basin Hand Washing; humph, my head can be cut off, but my will can not be bent." He took a step forward and reached for the gold basin.

"Hold it!" Shi Dengda yelled out. He waved the Command Flag and blocked the way.

Reaching his left hand out, Liu Zhengfeng poked at Shi's eyes. She Dengda raised both of his arms to block when Liu Zhengfeng abruptly pulled his left hand back and poked with his right hand. With no other options, Shi Dengda had to take a step back.

After forcing Shi Dengda back, Liu Zhengfeng reached for the gold basin again, when he heard some kind of swooshing sounds from behind his back – and two people had jumped on him. Without turning around, Liu Zhengfeng threw a swift back kick with his left foot. “Bang,” a Songshan apprentice flew into the air. Then he grabbed back with his right hand following the direction of the sound and grabbed at another Songshan apprentice’s collar. Pulling toward the direction of the force, he lifted the second apprentice over his shoulder and threw him toward Shi Dengda. The back kick with his left foot and the back grab with his right hand were executed so swiftly and accurately that it was almost like he had eyes on his back. The unusual skills of an elite fighter were clearly shown in those moves.

In shock, no more Songshan apprentices dared to come at Liu Zhengfeng again. The Songshan apprentice behind Liu Zhengfeng’s son shouted, “Uncle-Master Liu, if you don’t stop right now, I will have to kill your son.”

Liu Zhengfeng turned his head back and threw a glance at his son. “With so many heroes here today, if you dare to touch a single hair of my son, all you dozens of Songshan apprentices will be grounded into ten thousand pieces,” he said coldly.

These were not bluffing words. If this Songshan apprentice had really hurt his young son, it would certainly arouse public indignation, and cause all of the guests to attack the Songshan apprentices, and then none of the Hengshan apprentices would make it out alive. He turned back and reached for the gold basin once again.

It seemed that no one would be able to stop Liu Zhengfeng this time, when suddenly, with a silver flash, a tiny missile flew over. Liu Zhengfeng took two steps back; “Ring,” the missile hit the edge of the gold basin and knocked it down to the ground. “Clank,” the gold basin flipped over and landed bottom up; water splashed all over the floor. Meanwhile, a yellow shadow jumped off the rooftop,

and in a flash, had rushed by the fallen gold basin. He stomped on the gold basin; the gold basin collapsed under his foot and was flattened.

In his forties, the man had medium height. He was an extremely thin man with ugly mustaches under his nose. "Apprentice brother Liu, I've got orders from the Alliance Chief to not let you have your Gold Basin Hand Washing," he said, cupping his hands toward Liu Zhengfeng.

Liu Zhengfeng knew the man in front of him. His name was Fei Bin, and he was the fourth apprentice brother of Zuo Lengchan – the Head Master of the Songshan Sword School. His outstanding skills in "Great Songyang Palm" earned him great fame in the Martial World. Obviously, people sent by Songshan Sword School to deal with him included more than just second-generation apprentices. Since the gold basin had been destroyed, there was no way to continue the Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony. Should he fight with all his might or temporarily endure humiliation? Liu Zhengfeng could not make up his mind. Then he quickly thought, "Even though the Songshan Sword School has the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, they are so overbearing. Among the one thousand or so heroes here today, someone had got to stand out and uphold justice." So he cupped his hand to salute back.

"Apprentice brother Fei, why didn't you join us and enjoy a cup of wine, but would rather hide on top of the roof to suffer from the sun? Probably there are even more masters from Songshan Sword School here today. Please all come out now. If you want to deal with me, apprentice brother Fei is more than enough. If you want to wipe out all these heroes here today, the power of the Songshan Sword School probably is not yet enough."

"Apprentice brother Liu," Fei Bin said with a slight smile, "you don't need to foment discord. Just to fight apprentice brother Liu you alone, I wouldn't have a chance defending myself against the 'Slight Geese Landing' Kung Fu you have

just showed. The Songshan Sword School would never dare to offend the Hengshan Sword School, and would never dare to offend any hero here today either; we wouldn't even dare to just offend apprentice brother Liu. We are only here to beg apprentice brother Liu to not Wash Hands for the sake of thousands of fellow martial people's lives."

Hearing these words, everyone in the Big Hall was greatly surprised. "Whether or not Liu Zhengfeng has his Gold Basin Hand Washing, how could it affect thousands of fellow martial people's lives?" They all pondered the question.

"Well," Sister Dingyi cut in again, "brother Liu wants to wash his hands and accept that tiny sergeant title. To be frank, I really didn't approve that idea. But everybody has his own will. Heck, if he wants to win promotion and get rich, as long as he does not harm people and do not go against the chivalry side, then no one has the right to prevent him. I don't think brother Liu has the kind of ability to harm so many fellow martial people."

"Sister Dingyi," Fei Bin said, "you are a devout Buddhist, that's why you don't understand the kind of dirty tricks that are used by others. If this big conspiracy got through, then not only will countless of fellow martial people die, a lot of innocent citizens will also be greatly harmed. Please think about it, Liu Sir of the Hengshan Sword School is a famous and well-respected hero in the Martial World. Why would he lower himself and endure the kind of ill treatment by those filthy government officials? Liu Sir already has tons of money, why would he hanker after promotion and money? There is really a sinister reason here."

"That sounds reasonable," everyone thought to himself or herself. "I have felt suspicious earlier: why would someone like Liu Sir accept such a tiny government title? How odd?"

"Apprentice brother Fei, if you want to throw maliciously slanders at me, at least make it sound right," Liu Zhengfeng said with a laugh, holding his anger back. "Other apprentice

brothers of the Songshan Sword School, why don't you show yourself now?"

"Fine!" voices came from both the east side and the west side of the roof. Two yellow shadows flashed by in front of everyone's eyes and two men appeared at the entrance of the hall. The Qing-Gong they used was the exactly same type Fei Bin had used earlier when he jumped down the roof. The one standing to the east was a big fatty with broad shoulders. Sister Dingyi and others recognized him to be the second apprentice brother of the Songshan Sword School Head Master, "Tower Holding Palm" Ding Mian. The one standing to the west was a tall and thin man. He was the third apprentice of the Songshan Sword School, "Crane Hands" Lu Bai. "Hi, Liu Sir. Hi, everyone," the two cupped their hands slightly to greet. Ding Mian and Lu Bai both had great fame in the Martial World; everyone stood up to greet back.

Seeing that more and more first-class Songshan masters showed up, all had a gut feeling that this whole thing was not going to end pleasantly. Most likely Liu Zhengfeng would get the worst of it.

"Brother Liu, don't worry. All things in this world cannot go against righteousness. Even though they have an overwhelming number of guys, the friends from our Taishan Sword School, Huashan Sword School, and Heng-Shan Sword School aren't just a bunch of good-for-nothing guys either," Sister Dingyi said angrily.

"Sister Dingyi," Liu Zhengfeng said with a wry smile, "this is so embarrassing. It is really an internal affair with my Hengshan Sword School, yet it caused worries for so many friends. It is very clear in my mind that my senior apprentice brother Mo must have complained to Alliance Chief Zuo of the Songshan Sword School, which brought so many apprentice brothers of the Songshan Sword School here to denounce my wrong deeds. Fine, fine, fine! It was my fault that I have not shown good manners to senior apprentice

brother Mo. I will apologize to senior apprentice brother Mo and ask for his forgiveness.”

Fei Bin glanced around the hall, his eyes squinting, yet appearing to be bright and piercing, clearly showing his great inner energy.

“What does this have anything to do with Great Mr. Mo? Great Mr. Mo, please come out, so we can straighten this out,” he demanded.

After his words, the entire hall quieted down, but after quite a while, “Night Rain of Xiaoxiang” – Great Mr. Mo still did not step out.

Liu Zhengfeng let out a wry smile. “Everyone in the Martial World has already known that my apprentice brother Mo and I don’t get along, so I really don’t have to hide this fact. I am lucky to have been born in a rich family and inherited quite a few assets from my ancestors. My apprentice brother Mo, on the other hand, came from a very poor family. Normally speaking, even friends should be giving loans to each other, not mentioning apprentice brothers, but just because of the difference here, senior apprentice brother Mo loathed about it and never come to my home. We have not seen each other or contacted each other for years. Of course senior apprentice brother Mo would not come here today. What really ticked me off was the fact that simply with the one-sided story from my senior apprentice brother Mo, Alliance Chief Zuo had sent so many apprentice brothers here to deal with me today, even taking my wife and my children prisoner. Don’t...don’t you think you are making a fuss over a trifling matter?”

“Raise the Command Flag,” Fei Bin said to Shi Dengda.

“Yes!” Shi Dengda answered and raised the Command Flag high in the air by the side of Fei Bin.

“Apprentice brother Liu,” Fei Bin said grimly, “the matter today has nothing to do with the Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School, Great Mr. Mo. You don’t need to mix him into this. Alliance Chief Zuo has ordered us to



investigate what secret collaboration does apprentice brother Liu have with the Demon Cult Chief – Dongfang Invincible, and what plot you are developing to attack our Five Mountains Sword Alliance and other chivalrous martial fellows.”

Everyone in the Big Hall was greatly stunned by those words. Many could not help but utter a cry of surprise. The Demon Cult was the ultimate enemy of all the martial people on the good side of the Martial World. The two sides had scores tracing back to a hundred year, fighting continuously all these years with exchanging triumphs. Among the thousand or so people in the Big Hall, at least half of them had old scores to settle with the Demon Cult – some lost family members in the fights, and others lost senior masters. Every time the name Demon Cult was mentioned, all would bite their lips hard with hatred. The ultimate reason why the Five Mountains sword schools had formed an alliance was to unite together to fight the Demon Cult. Demon Cult had many followers and did not lack highly skilled elite fighters; that was why even though the chivalrous schools all had unique skills of their own, they still failed to defeat the Demon Cult. Furthermore, Demon Cult Chief, Dongfang Invincible, maintained the title of “Number One in the Martial World.” His name was Invincible, and he had never lost a single fight after he completed his apprenticeship; that was simply incredible. So when everyone heard Fei Bin criticizing Liu Zhengfeng for collaborating with the Demon Cult, which did relate to everyone’s own life, the sympathy they had toward Liu Zhengfeng evaporated instantly.

“I have never seen Demon Cult Chief Dongfang Invincible before in my whole life. Where did you get the idea of the so-called collaboration and the so-called plots?” Liu Zhengfeng asked.

Fei Bin turned his head to the side and stared at his third apprentice brother Lu Bai, waiting for him to speak.

“Apprentice brother Liu, what you just said might be a bit shallow. There’s an Elder in the Demon Cult named Qu Yang. I wonder if apprentice brother Liu knows him?” Lu Bai said in a soft voice.

Liu Zhengfeng had remained calm since the beginning of the disturbance, but as soon as he heard the name “Qu Yang” mentioned, his face changed color. He shut his mouth tight and did not answer the question.

The fatty Ding Mian had not said anything since he entered the hall, but now he suddenly shouted harshly, “Do you know Qu Yang?” His voice sounded like a thunder, echoing in everyone’s ears. He was a big and tall guy, yet now he seemed to be even bigger and taller in everyone’s eyes, looking like a majestic giant.

Liu Zhengfeng still did not answer. Thousands of eyes stared at his face. Everyone thought the same thing – if he could not think of an answer, then he was really admitting to it.

After a long while, Liu Zhengfeng finally nodded. ‘That’s right! I not only know big brother Qu Yang, but also consider him the only person that knows my heart and is my best friend.’

Instantly, the big hall was taken over by uproar. These words of Liu Zhengfeng caught everyone by surprise. Everyone had thought that he would at least try to deny the allegation, or only admitting that he probably had met that Qu Yang once or twice. No one expected him to claim that this Demon Cult Elder was actually his best friend.

Fei Bin let out a relaxed smile. “It’s great that you admit it. A true man takes on his own responsibilities. Liu Zhengfeng, Alliance Chief Zuo has given you two options to choose from.”

Liu Zhengfeng paid no attention to him as if he had not heard any word from Fei Bin. He sat down slowly with no specific expression on his face, and poured himself a cup of wine. Raising the cup to his lips, he drank the wine slowly.

Everyone could see that his robe and his long sleeves remained dead still, no trembling what's so ever. That was a good indication that he had a very good grip of himself, even in such an emergent situation. It was clearly shown that his courage and his Kung Fu skills were both first-class. Without any one of the two, he would not have behaved in such a calm way. Inwardly, everyone could not help but praise him.

"Alliance Chief Zuo said: Liu Zhengfeng is one with extraordinary talents in the Hengshan Sword School. He just made friends with the wrong kind of people and tumbled down the wrong way. We, as friends of the chivalrous side in the Martial World, only want to help him, so of course we will give him a way to correct his errors. Alliance Chief Zuo asked me to take a message to apprentice brother Liu: If you want to take this option, then within the next month, slay the Demon Cult Elder Qu Yang. Once you come back with his head, we will all forget about this incident, and be good friends and good brothers again," Fei Bin said loudly.

Everyone in the Big Hall thought, "Good and evil are mutually exclusive. Every single time when people from various heretical sects that belong to the Demon Cult meet people from the chivalrous side of the Martial World, fierce fights break out. It was not too much of a request from Alliance Chief Zuo to ask Liu Zhengfeng to kill Qu Yang to show his sincerity."

A sad smile flashed by Liu Zhengfeng's face. "Big brother Qu and I already felt like old friends when we first met," he said. "During the dozen of times when we had long chats late into the night, occasionally we would talk about the different opinions between schools and clans. He would always sigh deeply and consider such fights and conflicts unproductive and ineffective. I only made friends with big brother Qu for the sake of music. He is an expert in zither; I like to play the bamboo flute. Most of the times when we get together, we just played the zither and flute, never discussing Kung Fu skills." He paused, smiled, and then went on, "Maybe you

don't believe this, but in the entire world today, I think no one plays the zither better than big brother Qu; and regarding bamboo flute skills, I also consider myself not inferior than anyone else. Although big brother Qu is a member of the Demon Cult, from the music of his zither play, I could tell that he had noble character and the breadth of a man with integrity. Liu Zhengfeng not only admires him, but also looks up to him. Although I am just a coarse guy, I would never agree to harm such a gentleman."

Everyone was greatly surprised by these words. No one had anticipated that he actually made friends with Qu Yang all because of music. From the honest look on his face without a single trace of deceiving, one simply could not help but believe him. Since many people in the Martial World had unusual or out of the ordinary behaviors, music was well known to have fascinating power upon people; it wouldn't be a surprise to know that Liu Zhengfeng had such a hobby. People who knew the Hengshan Sword School well also thought, "Many generations of Hengshan Masters all loved music. Even the current Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School, Great Mr. Mo, has a nickname of 'Night Rain of Xiao Xiang' – a famous music title. He never lets his huqin<sup>45</sup> leave his side, and people described his Kung Fu as 'sword hidden in the Huqin, sword plays the music.' Then it is definitely possible that Liu Zhengfeng made friends with Qu Yang because of his love of playing the bamboo flute."

"Alliance Chief Zuo clearly knows that you made friends with Devil Qu for the sake of music based on his own investigation," Fei Bin did not object. "He said: The Demon Cult has secret and evil plots. They know that our Five Mountains Sword Alliance is gaining more and more prosperities these last couple of years, and might grow into an opponent they cannot fight. That is why they are trying all kinds of tricks to try to hurt us by fomenting discord. They tempt some with gold and treasure, others with beautiful women. Apprentice brother has been a man of integrity, so

they tried to cater your tastes and sent Qu Yang to work you with music. Apprentice brother Liu! Please wake up! Don't you remember how many people on our side had been slain by the Demon Cult? Don't you see that you have fallen into evil's trap?"

"That's right!" Sister Dingyi agreed. "Apprentice brother Fei is right. The terror of the Demon Cult wasn't really because of any high level Kung Fu of theirs. It was because of their various cunning schemes that are so hard to guard against. Apprentice brother Liu, you are a man of integrity. It's all right that you got tricked by an evil villain. You can kill Qu Yang the devil with a single blow. It's just as simple as that. Our Five Mountains Sword Alliance has the same root with different branches. You must not let the villains of the Demon Cult drive a wedge between our fellow martial friends and damage our relationship."

Priest Tian-Men nodded with concord. "Apprentice brother Liu, a gentleman's mistake is as easy to spot as the sun and the moon. Once he learns about the mistake and corrects himself, the gain suppresses the harm. All you need to do is to kill that Qu-named devil, then people in the chivalrous side will all raise their thumbs and praise, 'Liu Zhengfeng of the Hengshan Sword School is a true man who can distinguish between good and evil.' And we, as your friends, would look good too."

Liu Zhengfeng did not answer. He turned and stared right into Yue Buqun's eyes.

"Apprentice brother Yue, you are a true gentleman who can distinguish between right and wrong. Many of the masters here are forcing me to sell out my friend. What would you say?"

"Brother Liu," Yue Buqun answered, "if he were a true friend, then we martial people wouldn't even frown if we have to die for friends. But that Qu of the Demon Cult obviously has evil intent behind his smiles. With honey on his lips, he really has murder in his heart when he catered to

your tastes. This kind of enemy is the evilest kind. His object is to bring disgrace and ruin upon you and destroy your family. The evil intention of him is to the extreme. If such a person can still be called a friend, then isn't it a disgrace to the definition of 'friend?' In history, there were many examples of people placing righteousness above family loyalty. Even family can be disregarded, why cannot such a big devil and a big villain that should have never be considered as a friend be disregarded?"

Hearing his theory, everyone cheered. "Mr. Yue's words have said it clearly. With friends, one of course should consider the code of honor, but with enemies, one should strike down with no mercy. Why restrict oneself with the code of honor?"

Liu Zhengfeng let out a sigh. He waited till the Big Hall quieted down before speaking again slowly.

"At the very beginning when I decided to make friends with big brother Qu, I had expected something like this to happen. After some careful observations, I came upon the conclusion that there will be a big fight between our Five Mountains Sword Alliance and the Demon Cult soon. Once the fight breaks out, there will be apprentice brothers in the alliance on one side and a good friend on the other side. It would be impossible for me to help either side. That's why I came up with this dumb idea to have my Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony. I just wanted to tell everyone in the Martial World that Liu Zhengfeng would be leaving the Martial World and never be involved in any of the score-settling fights. I just wished I could stay out of everything, and not get involved. Buying this tiny army sergeant title was just a way to disgrace myself and hide my true intentions. But Alliance Chief Zuo is certainly resourceful. This move of mine simply could not fool him."

Hearing his explanation, everyone finally understood. All thought, "So he really had secret intentions behind the Gold Basin Hand Washing event. I figured there would be no way

that such a master of the Hengshan Sword School would be willing to accept such a tiny title from the government.” After the explanation, everyone found himself or herself having the foresight way ahead of time.

Fei Bin, Ding Mian, and Lu Bai looked at each other and all felt quite contended. “If it weren’t for apprentice brother Zuo, who saw through your conspiracy and stopped you in time, your plan would have succeeded,” they all thought.

Liu Zhengfeng continued, “For the last one hundred years, the Demon Cult and our chivalrous side have been fighting with each other back and forth. It would be impossible to go over the reasons behind all these fights. All I want is to stay away from such violent and fierce fights, and live my remaining years in a quiet place, playing the flute and teaching some kids, just like an average law abiding citizen. I think this wish of mine does not violate my school rules and the alliance treaty of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance.”

“If everyone thinks like you do, and desert on the eve of a battle, then do we just let the Demon Cult control the Martial World and harm everybody? If you wanted to stay out of this, then why didn’t the Qu-named devil stay out of everything?” Fei Bin sneered.

With a slight smile, Liu Zhengfeng answered, “Big brother Qu had vowed to the ancestors of the Demon Cult right in front of my eyes a while back, promising that no matter how the Demon Cult fights with the chivalrous side, he would always stay out of it and never interfere. As long as no one attacks him, he will not attack anyone!”

“Huh, how wonderful!” Fei Bin sneered again. “What if someone from the chivalrous side does attack him?”

“Big brother Qu said that he would try his best to endure and never fight anyone for fame and victory. He would even try his best to mend the gap of misunderstanding between the two sides. Just this morning, big brother Qu sent me a message saying that Huashan apprentice Linghu Chong was

wounded terribly by others, and was on the verge of dying. It was him who took the initiative and saved Linghu Chong."

Noises broke out in the crowd again, especially among ones belonging to the Huashan Sword School, Heng-Shan Sword School, and Qingcheng Sword School, who immediately started whispering to each other's ears. Yue Lingshan from the Huashan Sword School could not help asking, "Uncle-Master Liu, where is my big apprentice brother? Is it really...that Qu-named...Qu-named senior master who saved his life?"

"If big brother Qu said so, then of course it's true," Liu Zhengfeng answered. "When you see nephew Linghu later, you can ask him yourself."

"What's so strange about that?" Fei Bin mocked. "Demon Cult members always try to foment discord, using any means they could get their hands on. If he could use every possible means to draw you in, of course he would use every possible means to draw a Huashan apprentice. Maybe Linghu Chong would feel so grateful and want to return the favor. Then we would have another traitor in our Five Mountains Sword Alliance." He then turned to Yue Buqun and explained, "Apprentice brother Yue, I am just using this as a way of analogy. Please don't mind."

"I don't mind," Yue Buqun answered with a smile.

"Apprentice brother Fei," Liu Zhengfeng raised his eyebrows and asked loudly, "you said another traitor. What do you mean by 'another'?"

Fei Bin sneered, "You understand it very well. Do I still need to explain?"

"Humph, so are you calling me a traitor of my own school?" Liu Zhengfeng yelled. "It's my private matter who I want to make friends with. It's none of other people's business. Liu Zhengfeng does not dare to betray my Master and my Hengshan Sword School. I'll send the word 'traitor' right back to you."



Before, he had acted with good manners, just like a local gentleman, rich yet rustic. But now, he had shown a quite different image – one filled with vitality and heroic spirit. Seeing his tit for tat argument with Fei Bin and not giving away any ground, everyone admired his courage.

“I suppose apprentice brother Liu is not interested with this option, right? Are you sure you don’t want to rid the evil and kill that big devil Qu Yang?” Fei Bin asked.

“If Alliance Chief Zuo has given you the order, then go ahead, apprentice brother Fei, go ahead and kill my entire family!” Liu Zhengfeng answered with no hesitation.

“Are you thinking that just because so many heroes are visiting you in your home, our Five Mountains Sword Alliance would have scruples and give up on purifying our own group?” Fei Bin mocked.

“Come here!” he beckoned Shi Dengda.

“Yes!” Shi Dengda answered and took three steps forward.

Fei Bin took the five-colored Command Flag from Shi and raised it high. “Liu Zhengfeng, listen carefully: Alliance Chief Zuo has ordered that if you don’t agree to kill Qu Yang within a month, then the Five Mountains Sword Alliance will have no choice but to purify our own group. To prevent any future problem, we will have to rid the branches together with the root. You’d better think it through!”

Liu Zhengfeng let out a sad smile. “When I make a friend, I value the utter devotion. How could I kill a friend in exchange for my own protection? Since Alliance Chief Zuo does not allow this, I, Liu Zhengfeng, with only little power and backing, do not even stand a chance resisting Alliance Chief Zuo. Your Songshan Sword School has planned everything beforehand, probably even got my coffin ready. If you want to do it, then go ahead and do it. What are you waiting for?”

Fei Bin waved the Command Flag and said in a loud voice, “Apprentice brother Tian-Men of the Taishan Sword

School, Apprentice brother Yue of the Huashan Sword School, Sister Dingyi of the Heng-Shan Sword School, and apprentice brothers and nephew apprentices of the Hengshan Sword School, according to Alliance Chief Zuo's order: Good and evil can never coexist. The Demon Cult has heaps of scores with our Five Mountains Sword Alliance; the hatred is as deep as the ocean. Liu Zhengfeng associated himself with the devil and submitted himself to the enemy. Everyone in our Five Mountains Sword Alliance is obligated to attack him and kill him. All the ones that will follow the order please stand to the left."

Priest Tian-Men stood up and strode to the left without even looking at Liu Zhengfeng. Priest Tian-Men's Master had been slain by a female Demon Cult Elder, which was why he hated the Demon Cult to the very marrow of his bones. Once he walked to the left side, all his apprentices followed him over.

"Brother Liu," Yue Buqun stood up, "all you need to do is nod, and I, Yue Buqun, will take care of the business of Qu Yang for you. You said that a true man should not betray his friends, but is Qu Yang your only friend in this world? Aren't people in our Five Mountains Sword Alliance and many people here today your friends too? The thousands of fellow martial people here traveled long ways to congratulate you sincerely when they heard you were having your Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony. They've shown their friendship. Don't the lives of your entire family, kindness and friendship of your friends in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and the friendship of those hundreds of fellow martial people outweigh this one individual Qu Yang?"

Slowly shaking his head, Liu Zhengfeng answered, "Apprentice brother Yue, you are a scholar, you should have heard the saying of 'a true man has things he will not do.' I am grateful for your advice and your good words. When others force me to kill Qu Yang, I won't agree. Just like when someone forces me to kill you, apprentice brother Yue, or any

one of the friends here, I would never agree even if my entire family would be wiped out as the consequence. It's true that big brother Qu is a good friend of mine, but apprentice brother Yue is also a good friend of mine. If big brother Qu has ever even mentioned about plotting against any friend of mine in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, I would have looked down upon his character and not consider him a friend." These words were said in a very sincere way and moved many people in the Big Hall. Brotherhood was a greatly valued virtue in the Martial World, so even though these martial people did not like the fact that Liu Zhengfeng defended his relationship with Qu Yang, they all praised Liu Zhengfeng inwardly.

Yue Buqun shook his head and argued, "Brother Liu, you said it wrong. Your valuing of brotherhood is very admirable, but you did not distinguish between good and evil or right and wrong. The Demon Cult committed countless number of crimes and harmed many gentlemen and innocent people. Just for the sake of your interest in music, giving your wholehearted devotion to him is a terrible misunderstanding of the definition of 'brotherhood'."

"Apprentice brother Yue, you don't play any instrument, that's why you don't understand me here," Liu Zhengfeng explained with a smile. "A person can lie using words, but the sound of flute or zither is directly from one's heart and can't lie. Big brother Qu and I have played the flute and zither together. We fully understand each other wholeheartedly. I can guarantee you with my life and my reputation that although big brother Qu is a member of the Demon Cult, he does not have any trace of evil of the Demon Cult."

With a long sigh, Yue Buqun walked by Priest Tian-Men's side. Lau Denuo, Yue Lingshan, Lu Dayou, and the bunch all followed him over.

Sister Dingyi stared at Liu Zhengfeng. "Starting from now on, should I call you brother Liu or Liu Zhengfeng?" she asked.

“Liu Zhengfeng is bound to die any minute now. Sister, there’s no need for either one,” Liu Zhengfeng replied with a wry smile.

Sister Dingyi put her palms together, forming a Buddhist greeting posture, and then prayed, “May Buddha preserve us!” She slowly walked by Yue Buqun, saying, “The Demon has added more crimes into the world. What a sin, what a sin!” Her apprentices also followed her over.

“This is the personal matter of Liu Zhengfeng. It has nothing to do with other people. Apprentices of Hengshan Sword School, if you don’t want to follow the traitor, you can stand to the left side too,” Fei Bin declared.

After a short silence, a young man murmured, “Uncle-Master Liu, please pardon us apprentices.” Then thirty or so Hengshan apprentices walked to the side of the nuns of the Heng-Shan Sword School. Those were all Liu Zhengfeng’s nephew apprentices, since none of the other senior masters of the Hengshan Sword School came to the ceremony.

“Apprentices of Liu House stand to the left side too,” Fei Bin yelled again.

Xiang Danian answered loudly, “We value the grace of our Master. We will never betray him. We as apprentices of Liu will always be with our beloved Master, dead or alive.”

Warm tears swamped Liu Zhengfeng’s eyes. “Good, good! Danian, your words are already great comforts for your Master. Why don’t you all walk over? It was your Master, I, who made the friend. It has nothing to do with any of you.”

With a loud “clank” sound, Mi Weiwei drew his sword out. “The Liu House undoubtedly is no match for the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. But what more could we lose other than our lives. Whoever wants to harm my Master has to kill me first,” he exclaimed while standing right in front of Liu Zhengfeng, blocking him protectively.

Ding Mian waved his left hand slightly, and a silver flash zipped out in extreme speed. In shock, Liu Zhengfeng pushed Mi Weiwei’s right shoulder hurriedly using his inner

energy. Mi Weiyi was pushed to the left, and the silver flash headed directly toward Liu Zhengfeng's chest. Eager to protect his Master, Xiang Danian jumped forth to block, and the silver needle penetrated his heart squarely. He only had enough time to let out a painful groan before falling dead. Liu Zhengfeng lifted Xiang's body with his left arm and checked his breath. He then turned to Ding Mian. "Ding second, it is your Songshan Sword School who has killed my apprentice first!"

"Precisely. We killed first. So what?" Ding Mian mocked coldly.

Liu Zhengfeng picked up Xiang Danian's body with both arms; it seemed as if he was going to throw the body toward Ding Mian. Ding Mian had long known that the Hengshan Sword School inner power style had some unique traits. Liu Zhengfeng was a first-class elite fighter in the Hengshan Sword School; from the way he gathered his strength, Ding Mian could tell that the strength of the throw must be tremendous, so he gathered his inner energy and readied himself to catch the body, so he could throw it right back. Although it appeared that Liu Zhengfeng picked up the body to throw it forward, he suddenly jumped to the side, holding the body in his hands and sent it toward Fei Bin's chest. The change was so swift and dramatic that Fei Bin was caught by a total surprise. He had to raise both of his palms and blocked the body with double knife hands, when suddenly he felt numbness from his ribs – Liu Zhengfeng had sealed his acupoints.

After the successful move, Liu Zhengfeng grabbed the Command Flag from Fei Bin's grip using his left hand, while drawing Fei's sword with his right hand and placed the blade right on Fei Bin's throat. Then he struck Fei Bin's back on multiple spots with his left elbow rapidly and sealed another three acupoints on Fei's back. He moved so fast that he completed the entire series of moves before Xiang Danian's body even landed on the floor.

After Fei Bin was taken prisoner and the Command Flag exchanged hands, everyone finally realized that the moves Liu Zhengfeng used were from the unique Kung Fu of the Hengshan Sword School called “Magical Thirteen Phantom Stances of Hengshan Mist.” People had heard about it for a long time, and now they were lucky enough to actually see it with their own eyes. Yue Buqun had heard from his Master many years ago that a great master from the last generation of the Hengshan Sword School created the “Magical Thirteen Phantom Stances of Hengshan Mist.” That great master made a living by traveling around performing magic shows. Magic tricks relied on illusions and redirecting audiences’ attentions. When that great master was in his old age, his Kung Fu skills became higher, and so did his skills with magic tricks. He was actually able to use his inner energy and Kung Fu skills in his magic tricks, entertaining a great amount of street audiences. Then later, he was able to merge his magic trick skills into his Kung Fu skills. He was a funny guy and created this set of Kung Fu just for fun, having no idea that the set of Kung Fu would become one of the three unique sets of Hengshan Kung Fu skills. Although the set of Kung Fu had very odd and unexpected moves, it actually was not very useful in a real serious fight because when masters fight, each would be guarding himself carefully and protect his own vital parts well, thus rendering these tricky and flashing moves useless. That was why even the Hengshan Sword School didn’t emphasize on teaching it. If the apprentice appeared to be a flashy one, then the master would not teach him that set of Kung Fu so that the apprentice won’t be relying on fake and flashy moves and lose focus with the real rudimentary type of Kung Fu skills. Liu Zhengfeng was the quiet and deep type. After he learned that set of Kung Fu from his Master, he had not used it ever until today. Now when he used it in such an emergent situation, it actually worked wonders and helped him take control of the notable

“Great Songyang Palm” Fei Bin, whose real Kung Fu skills were definitely no less than his.

Lin Zhengfeng held the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword alliance high with his right hand and grabbed tight the sword that was on Fei Bin’s throat with his left hand, then said firmly, “Apprentice brother Ding, apprentice brother Lu, I made bold and took the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. I dare not threaten the two of you; I just want to beg mercy from you.”

Ding Mian and Lu Bai looked at each other, both thinking, “Since apprentice brother Fei had fallen for his tricky attack, we’d better listen to what he has to say first.”

“What kind of mercy?” Ding Mian asked.

“Would you two please take a message to Alliance Chief Zuo for me,” Liu Zhengfeng said, “Asking for his permission to let me and my family to withdraw from civilization and live in solitude without ever getting involved in any matter of the Martial World? I will not see big brother Qu Yang ever again, and I will be leaving you, the apprentice brothers and friends here today...as well. I will bring my family and my apprentices to leave the country and live a hermit’s life. As long as I am alive, we will never step on the ground of China again.”

“Apprentice brother Lu and I can not make a decision on that. We will have to report this to apprentice brother Zuo to get his judgment,” Ding Mian hesitated for a second and then replied.

“We have the Head Masters of the Taishan Sword School and the Huashan Sword School here, plus Sister Dingyi from the Heng-Shan Sword School, who should be able to make a decision representing her Head Master apprentice sister. In addition, all the fellow martial people and heroes here today can act as eye witnesses,” Liu Zhengfeng argued. He glanced around everybody and said in a deep voice, “I am begging for a favor from all you friends. Please let me save my family

and my apprentices while not betraying my belief in brotherhood."

Sister Dingyi was the type who acted tough with a hot-temper, yet very kind in one's heart. She first agreed.

"That would be great, thus we won't damage our good relationship. Apprentice brother Ding and apprentice brother Lu, let's agree to brother Liu. Since he wouldn't be seeing any member of the Demon Cult, and he will be far away, it'll be like there isn't a Liu Zhengfeng in this world at all. Why do we have to commit more killing?"

"That sounds good." Priest Tian-Men also nodded. "Brother Yue, what do you think?"

"Brother Liu's words are as solid as a mountain," Yue Buqun said. "If he said so, of course we all trust him. Come on! Let's turn hostility into friendship. Brother Liu, you set brother Fei free, and then we'll all drink a cup of friendly wine. Tomorrow morning, you can take your family and your apprentices to leave the town of Hengshan!"

"Even the Head Masters of Taishan and Huashan said so, plus Sister Dingyi is also pleading for Liu Zhengfeng, how can we dare to oppose? But because apprentice brother Fei fell for Liu Zhengfeng's tricks, if we just agreed like that, everyone in the Martial World will be saying that the Songshan Sword School was taken hostage by Liu Zhengfeng and had to give in. When rumors like this spreads out, what would happen to our reputation?" Lu Bai said.

"It is brother Liu who is begging for mercy from the Songshan Sword School. He wasn't threatening or forcing you. Talk about 'give in', it is Liu Zhengfeng who is giving in, not the Songshan Sword School. And you've already killed an apprentice of the Liu House," Sister Dingyi said.

"Di Xiu, get ready!" Lu Bai said after a disgruntled snort.

"Yes!" Songshan apprentice Di Xiu answered. He pushed the short sword in his hand forward a bit, until the tip of the blade penetrated the cloth and reached Liu Zhengfeng's eldest son's back muscle.



“Liu Zhengfeng, if you want to beg for mercy, then come back with us to Mount Songshan and see Alliance Chief Zuo. You can beg him for mercy yourself. We are just following orders. We can’t make decisions. Give me back the Command Flag and set my apprentice brother Fei free,” Lu Bai demanded.

With a sad smile, Liu Zhengfeng turned to his son. “Son, are you afraid to die?”

“I am with you, Dad. I am not afraid!” Liu’s son exclaimed.

“Good kid!” Liu Zhengfeng said.

“Kill him!” Lu Bai yelled.

Di Xiu pushed the sword forward. The tip of the short sword went all the way until it penetrated the heart. Then he pulled the short sword out as Liu’s son collapsed onto the floor, blood gushing out from the wound on his back.

Madam Liu, Liu Zhengfeng’s wife, screamed and rushed by her son’s body.

“Kill her too!” Lu Bai yelled again.

Di Xiu thrust his sword forward. The blade penetrated Madam’s Liu’s back.

Sister Dingyi’s anger exploded. “Swoosh,” she slammed her palm toward Di Xiu while swearing, “You monster!” Ding Mian rushed forward and also pushed out with his palm. The two palms met squarely in the midair, sending Sister Dingyi stumbling three steps back. Sister Dingyi felt a great pain from her chest, with blood gushing out of her throat into her mouth. She was the type that would always try to best others, so she immediately swallowed the blood back in, not showing any weakness.

“Thanks for your grace!” Ding Mian smirked.

Sister Dingyi’s Kung Fu was not specialized in her palm strength; in addition, she didn’t put a lot of strength into her palm strike toward Di Xiu, because she, as a senior, did not want to kill Di Xiu, a junior. But when Ding Mian suddenly took on her palm strike with all his strength, and at the time

when the two palms met, it was already too late for Sister Dingyi to add more strength to the strike. Ding Mian's strength overwhelmed Sister Dingyi like a huge wave and injured her badly. In great rage, Sister Dingyi wanted to strike out with her palm again, but when she tried to gather her inner energy, great pain came from her abdomen. It almost felt like that someone was cutting her flesh with a knife. Realizing how severely she had been injured, she clearly knew that she would have no chance of winning the fight with Ding Mian today, so she beckoned her apprentices and said angrily, "Let's go!" then strode out of the gate. All her apprentices followed her.

"Kill more!" Lu Bai yelled again.

Two Songshan apprentices pushed their short swords forward and killed two more apprentices of Liu House.

"Listen carefully, Liu House apprentices," Lu Bai said. "If you want to live, then kneel down now and beg for mercy. Whoever is willing to condemn Liu Zhengfeng, his life will be spared."

"You filthy murderers! Your Songshan Sword School is ten thousand times eviler than the Demon Cult!" Liu Zhengfeng's daughter Liu Jing swore angrily.

"Kill!" Lu Bai yelled.

Wan Daping raised his long sword and chopped downward. The blade cut through Liu Jing's right shoulder and went all the way down to her waist. Shi Dengda and other Songshan apprentices also thrust out their swords and killed the Liu House apprentices whose acupoints were sealed earlier.

Although the people in the Big Hall were used to dangerous lives, yet all were greatly shocked by the massacre scene. Some senior masters had wanted to call them to stop, but the Songshan Sword School had acted so fast that within the moment of hesitation, the hall had been filled with dead bodies. Everyone then thought, "Good and evil can never coexist. The Songshan Sword School's acts

weren't really for any private score they have with Liu Zhengfeng, but acts to fight with the Demon Cult. Although the acts were kind of brutal, one really could not criticize them. In addition, at the moment, the Songshan Sword School had controlled the entire situation, even Sister Dingyi took a hit and left the scene, and Priest Tian-Men, Yue Buqun, and other first-class masters all kept their silence. This was the matter within the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. If any outsider pokes his nose into other people's business and jumps out to stir things up, he would be planting a dangerous seed for himself, and might get killed because of that. The best thing to do was to be worldly wise and play safe."

By then, among Liu House relatives and apprentices, all was left was Liu Qin, Liu Zhengfeng's youngest and favorite fifteen-year old son.

"Ask this lad whether he wants to beg for mercy. If he refuses, then cut his nose off first, then his ears, and then cut out his eyeballs. Let him have the pain in small dozes," Lu Bai directed Shi Dengda.

"Sure!" Shi Dengda answered. He turned to Liu Qin and asked, "Are you going to beg for mercy?"

Liu Qin's face was as white as a sheet. He couldn't help his trembling.

"Good kid, see how tough you brother and sister were. It's only death, nothing to be scared of," Liu Zhengfeng said.

"But...Dad," Liu Qin said with a trembling voice, "they want to...want to cut off my nose, and cut out...cut out my eyeballs...."

Liu Zhengfeng let out a laugh. "By now, do you still think they will let us live?"

"Dad, can't you...can't you just agree to kill Uncle...Uncle Qu...?" Liu Qin begged.

Liu Zhengfeng was enraged. "Garbage! You little bloody pig, what did you say?" he yelled.

Shi Dengda raised his long sword and moved the tip of the sword back and forth right in front of Liu Qin's nose. "Hey lad, I am going to cut down now if you don't kneel down and beg for mercy. One...two...."

Before the word "three" came out of Shi's mouth, Liu Qin had already knelt down on the floor. Trembling hard, he begged, "Don't...don't kill me...."

"Good! We'll spare you, only after you condemn Liu Zhengfeng in front of all the people here today." Lu Bai laughed.

Liu Qin stared at his father, his eyes filled with begging and pleading. Liu Zhengfeng had been able to maintain his calmness all the way through; even when his wife and children were slain right in front of his eyes, he kept a still face, but now he simply could not hold his anger. "You little bloody pig, aren't you ashamed of yourself right in front of your mother's dead body?" he yelled loudly.

Seeing his mother, brother and sister's bodies lying in the blood pool, also seeing Shi Dengda's long sword moving back and forth right in front of his face, Liu Qin was scared out of his wits.

"Please, please, I beg of you to spare my life, and spare... spare my dad's life," he said to Lu Bai.

"Your dad collaborated with the villains in the Demon Cult. Do you think it's right or wrong?" Lu Bai pressed.

"It's...wrong!" Liu Qin murmured.

"Should this kind of people be executed?" Lu Bai asked.

Liu Qin lowered his head and dared not to answer.

"The lad doesn't want to talk. Kill him!" Lu Bai ordered.

"Yes!" Shi Dengda answered. Knowing that Lu Bai really meant to just scare the kid, he raised his sword high and pretended to be chopping down.

"Yes...yes, they should!" Liu Qin muttered immediately.

"Very good! Starting from now on, you are not part of the Hengshan Sword School, neither are you Liu Zhengfeng's son any more. I spare your life," Lu Bai declared.

Liu Qin just remained in his kneeling position, not able to stand up with his scared to weak legs. Seeing that, people in the hall could not help but feel ashamed for him. Some turned their heads away, not able to bare themselves to such an embarrassing scene.

Liu Zhengfeng let out a long sigh. "Lu, you won!" Waving his right hand, he threw the Command Flag toward Lu Bai, at the meanwhile, raised his left leg and kicked Fei Bin away. "I'll finish it off on my own. No need for more killing now," he said loud and clear, turning the sword in his left hand and slashed it toward his own throat.

Right at the instant, a shadow in black robe glided down from underneath the eaves. The shadow moved as swift as a breeze and quickly grabbed onto Liu Zhengfeng's left wrist. "A wise man can wait ten years for his revenge. Let's go!" the shadow yelled out loud. His right hand waved in a circular motion toward his back, and then dragged Liu Zhengfeng toward the outside hurriedly.

"Big brother Qu...you...!" Liu Zhengfeng blurred out in shock.

Hearing the words "big brother Qu," everyone instantly realized that the man in black robe was none other than the Demon Cult Elder Qu Yang. All felt a shiver inside.

"No time for discussion!" Qu Yang shouted, running even faster. But only after running three steps, Ding Mian and Lu Bai's four palms had arrived toward the backs of the two.

"Run! Hurry!" Qu Yang yelled to Liu Zhengfeng, pushing hard on Liu Zhengfeng's back with his palm while gathering his own inner energy around his back. He took the solid strikes of the combination of Ding Mian and Lu Bai, the two first-class elite fighters, squarely on his back. "Bang!" Qu Yang's body was knocked flying in the air toward the gate.

Still in the air, Qu Yang spat out a spray of blood toward the back while waving his hands continuously. A cluster of black needles rained toward everybody behind him.

“Those are the Black Blood Sacred Needles, move away fast!” Ding Mian shouted while dodging to the side hurriedly.

Seeing the cluster of black needles flying toward them and knowing the great fame of the Black Blood Sacred Needles of the Demon Cult, people in the hall were all astounded. The crowd became a mass. In chaos, voices from dozens of people echoed in the hall: “Ouch!” “Wow!” Since there was quite a crowd in the hall and the Black Blood Sacred Needles were in great amount and great speed, the poisonous needles hit many. In the hubbub, Qu Yang and Liu Zhengfeng had escaped.

# **Chapter 7: Music Score**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**Three shadows walked out from behind the big rock. Under the dim starlight, it appeared to be two tall ones and a short one. The tall ones were two guys and the short one was a girl.**

Although Linghu Chong's injuries were very severe, with the help of the Heng-Shan Sword School's great medicines, "Heavenly Connecting Glue" applied outside and "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pills" taken orally, after just a day and two nights' sleep by the waterfall, his wounds had started to heal. The fact that Linghu Chong was a strong man still in his youth, and the good amount of inner energy developed from his martial arts training both contributed greatly to his fast recovery.

During the day and two nights, all they had were watermelons. Linghu Chong had begged Yilin to catch some fish or wild rabbits for a change, but she would not give any ground, saying that only because of the blessing from the Buddha, had Linghu Chong been able to narrowly escape from death, and it would be the best if he would become a vegetarian for a few years to show his grace to the Buddha. There was absolutely no way that she would violate the prohibition of killing. Linghu Chong laughed at her pedantry, yet could not force her, so he had no choice but to give it up.

It was already dark. The two of them rested with their back against a big rock and looked at the many fireflies flying in and out of the bushes. The flickering of the many fireflies painted a beautiful picture of the midsummer night.

"In the summer before the last one, I once caught thousands of fireflies and placed them in dozens of gauze bags to hang in the room. That was a lot of fun!" Linghu Chong said.

Figuring with his kind of temper, he would never have made dozens of gauze bags out of his own will, Yilin asked, "It was your little apprentice sister, who had asked you to catch those fireflies, wasn't it?"

"You are smart!" Linghu Chong smiled. "You got it right! How did you know my little apprentice sister asked me to do it?"

"You have such a hot-temper; besides, you are no longer a kid. How could you have such patience to catch thousands of fireflies just for fun?" Yilin answered with a smile. "So what happened afterwards?" she asked.

"Little apprentice sister hung all these gauze bags inside her bed curtains. She said that with so many twinkling around her bed, she would feel like sleeping above clouds. Every time when she opened her eyes, she would be seeing stars all around her."

"Your little apprentice sister certainly knows how to have fun. And she also got you, the apprentice brother, to join in with her. If she had wanted you to catch the stars in the sky, you probably would have agreed just the same," Yilin commented.

"Talk about catching the stars in the sky, that was actually the reason why we caught so many fireflies," Linghu Chong explained. "That night, she and I went out to enjoy the cool breezes of the night. When she saw the twinkling stars in the sky, little apprentice sister took a deep breath. 'It's too bad that a bit later I'll have to go to bed,' she said. 'I'd rather sleep outside under the night sky, so when I wake up in the middle of the night, I'll see all the stars blinking at me. That'll be so much fun! But Mother definitely won't allow that to happen.' So I suggested, 'Why don't I go catch some fireflies, and then put them in your bed curtain. They would look just like stars.'"

"So it was your idea after all," Yilin murmured gently.

"'But the fireflies would be flying in all directions,' Little apprentice sister said. 'It would be so annoying if some of them landed on my face. I got it! Why don't I sew some gauze bags and put the fireflies in those.' So she started making gauze bags while I worked on catching fireflies. We worked for an entire day and an entire night to get

everything ready. It was too bad that we were only able to enjoy it for the first night. By the second night, the fireflies all died."

Yilin's body shook at these words. "All the thousands of fireflies died? How...how could you...?" her voice quivered.

Linghu Chong grinned. "You wanted to say that we were too cruel, didn't you? Ah, you are a Buddhist with a very kind heart. When it gets cold, those fireflies would have frozen to death, anyway. They only died a couple days earlier. What's the big deal?"

"Actually it's no different for us human beings," after a long silence, Yilin finally said quietly. "Some will die sooner, and some will die later. Whether one dies sooner or later, he will die eventually. Buddha says that no one can escape the suffering of death, either by old age or by illness. It is so difficult to understand the ultimate truth regard the cycle of life."

"Well said! That's why there's no need for you to worry about all those rules and regulations, such as no killing, no stealing, and so on. If the Buddha had to watch out for every little thing out there, he would probably become exhausted," Linghu Chong exclaimed.

Speechless, Yilin turned her head away, just as a shooting star flashed across the night sky to their left, leaving a long beautiful light trail.

"Apprentice sister Yijing once said, that when you see a shooting star, if you can tie a knot using the ribbon on your robe and make a wish at the same time, then the wish will come true, as long as you can finish both of them before the shooting star disappears. Do you think that's real?" Yilin asked.

"I don't know," Linghu Chong answered. "Why don't we give it a try? But I don't think I can be that fast." He picked up the ribbon of his robe. "Better get ready yourself. One second slower, you wouldn't make it."

Yilin picked up the ribbon of her robe and gazed at the night sky. Shooting stars were not rare in summer nights. Only a few minutes later, another one streaked across the sky. In a flash, it had vanished. Yilin only had enough time to move a finger, and the shooting star was already gone. "Ah." She let out a gentle cry and then waited again. Soon, another shooting star appeared. It streaked from the west to the east and lasted a short while. Yilin had very quick fingers and actually tied a knot in time.

"Remarkable! Excellent! You finished the knot! Buddha Guanyin will surely bless you and make your wish come true!" Linghu Chong cheered.

"All I thought about was how to tie the knot in time. I forgot to make a wish." Yilin heaved a sigh.

"You'd better think of your wish ahead of time." Linghu Chong grinned. "Recite it a few times in your heart, so you won't forget to make your wish when you tie the knot."

"What should I wish for? What should I wish for?" holding the ribbon in her hands, Yilin thought inwardly. She glanced at Linghu Chong and suddenly flushed, immediately jerking her head around. By then several more shooting stars had streaked across the star-strewn indigo sky.

"Oops, another one! Wow, that was a long one. Did you tie the knot in time? You had enough time for that one," Linghu Chong shouted in excitement.

But Yilin's mind was as confused as a tangled skein. Deep in her heart, she had a vague wish, but that was a wish that she didn't even dare to think of, not to mention asking the Buddha to grant the wish. Her heart thumped hard as the feeling of unspeakable fear mingled with unspeakable joy washed over her. Then she heard Linghu Chong's voice.

"Have you gotten your wish yet?"

Yilin asked herself gently in her heart, "What should I wish for? What should I wish for?" Raising her head slightly and watching one shooting star after another flashing across the night sky, she found herself lost in thought.

"You are not gonna tell me, are you? Let me guess." Linghu Chong grinned.

"No, no, don't!" Yilin objected in a hurry.

"It's alright! Let me give it three tries, and see if I can get it." Linghu Chong said with an even bigger grin on his face.

"If you don't stop, I am leaving." Yilin stood up.

Linghu Chong burst into laughter. "Fine, I'll stop. There's nothing embarrassing about wishing to be the Head Master of the Heng-Shan Sword School."

Yilin was caught by surprise. "He...he thought I wanted to be the Head Master of the Heng-Shan Sword School? I never thought of anything like that. How would I ever be capable of being a Head Master?" she thought to herself.

Suddenly, the dim sound of a string instrument floated in from a distance. It seemed that someone was playing a zither. Linghu Chong and Yilin exchanged a surprised look, both taken aback: "Why would someone play the zither in such wilderness?"

The sound of the zither continued, smooth and graceful, and moments later, a few subdued sounds of a bamboo flute started playing accompanying the zither music. The sound of the seven-stringed zither was pastel and placid, when blended with the clear and elegant flute play, the tone seemed to have become even more soothing and touching. The music was played as though the zither and the flute were holding an intimate conversation, and gradually, the sound of music came closer and closer.

"Playing music here at this moment is kind of odd," Linghu Chong leaned toward Yilin and whispered to her ear. "I am afraid they might be hostile. No matter what happens, don't make any noise." Yilin nodded.

The sound of the zither gradually become louder and more sonorous, while the sound of the flute became lower and deeper, but the notes played by the flute were low yet unceasing, almost like a silk thread swaying in the breeze, incessant and soul stirring.

Amid the music play, three shadows walked out from behind the big rock following a small path. At the moment, a shallow cloud blocked the moon, so everything was enveloped in a shade of blur, and Linghu Chong could vaguely tell that the group consisted of two tall ones and a short one. The tall ones were two men, and the short one was a girl. The two men walked by a big rock in easy ambles and sat down, one playing the zither and one playing the flute. Quietly, the girl stood by the side of the zither-playing man. Slowly, Linghu Chong retracted himself back into hiding behind the rock wall, afraid that those three might see him. The melodious play of zither and flute continued in great harmony.

“There’s a waterfall right next by, yet the thundering of the falling water still cannot cover the soft and smooth music,” Linghu Chong thought. “These two players’ inner energy must have reached a remarkable height. Oh, I see. The sound of the waterfall is exactly the reason why they came here to play the music. It has gotten nothing to do with us.” At that thought, he felt more relaxed.

Suddenly, the sound of the zither turned loud and forceful, with the implication of battle and fights, but the flute play remained elegant and graceful. After a while, the zither play also turned mild and gentle, and both the zither and the flute switched between high notes and low notes back and forth. All of a sudden, the sounds of both the zither and the flute changed completely, as though there were many zithers and many flutes playing together in an orchestra. Although the music had changed into something magnificent with many complex florid notes, each tone and cadence stayed clear and meaningful and the melody remained pleasing and moving. Linghu Chong could feel that his mind had been completely captured by the music, and almost couldn’t help but stand up. After another while, the tone of the zither and the flute changed again. This time the flute took over the lead and the zither simply accompanied

with soothing chords. Soon, the sound of the flute play ascended higher and higher. Out of nowhere, the feelings of grieve and sadness rose and washed over Linghu Chong's heart. He turned to look at Yilin, only to find tears rolling down her cheeks like streams. A loud "ring" echoed suddenly, then the zither and the flute fell silent at the exact same instant. Silence swept across in all directions; all there left were the moon, shining high and bright in the indigo sky, casting still shadows from the endless of trees on the ground.

A voice said slowly, "Brother Liu, it must be fate that you and I have to die here today. It was really my fault that I didn't act sooner; otherwise, your entire family and all your apprentices wouldn't have lost their lives. I am so deeply disturbed."

"We are friends with unsurpassed devotion. There's really no need to explain...." another voice replied.

Hearing that voice, Yilin suddenly remembered. "That's Uncle-Master Liu Zhengfeng," She whispered at Linghu Chong's ear.

Neither of them had any idea about what had just happened inside Liu House, so both were stunned beyond words when they suddenly made out Liu Zhengfeng in the remote valley and hear his companion saying something like "you and I have to die here today" and "your entire family and all your apprentices have lost their lives."

"No one can escape the destiny of death," Liu Zhengfeng said. "Having met the soul-mate in his living, one would die with no regrets."

"Brother Liu, your flute play today seemed to have the implication of some kind of regret. Are you regretting about how your son cravenly clung to life instead of brave out death in the face of danger, and brought humiliation to your reputation?" the other man asked.

"Big brother Qu, you guessed it right. I have really spoiled the child too much and didn't teach him well,

shaping him into such a coward with no integrity." Liu Zhengfeng sighed deeply.

"With or without integrity, it's all the same," Qu Yang comforted him. "A hundred years later, we all will rot into dusts. What's the difference? When I was hiding on the rooftop, I should have acted sooner, but I figured you wouldn't want me to ruin your relationship with your friends in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance for my sake. I also thought about the vow I had with you that I would never hurt anyone in the Chivalrous Side. That's why I waited and waited. Who would have expected that the Songshan Sword School, the school housing the Alliance Chief, would act so viciously?"

Liu Zhengfeng did not answer and, for a long while, kept his silence. Eventually, with a deep sigh, he spoke again.

"How would any of these vulgar people ever understand the high spirits and graceful friendship of ours in music? Appraising with normal sense, they of course are convinced that our association would greatly harm the Five Mountains Sword Alliance and the Chivalrous Side. Alas, they don't understand, and we cannot really blame them. Big brother Qu, were you hit at your Da-Zhui Acupoint, which shook your heart arteries?"

"Yes," Qu Yang answered. "Songshan style inner energy is truly outstanding. When I took the hit on my back, I had no idea that the inner energy would be so strong to have passed through my body and broke your heart arteries with the shock, too. If I'd known earlier that you couldn't have escaped the hit, either, I wouldn't have shot out that cluster of 'Black Blood Sacred Needles.' Hurting more innocent people wouldn't have helped any bit. Luckily, those needles were not poisonous."

Hearing the name "Black Blood Sacred Needles," Linghu Chong felt his heart skip a beat. "This man saved my life. Could he have been an elite fighter of the Demon Cult? If that's true, why would Uncle-Master Liu befriend him?"



Liu Zhengfeng let out a slight smile. "But thanks to that, we got to play the zither and the flute together one last time. From now on, there will never be any zither and flute play like that."

Qu Yang heaved a deep sigh. "Legend has it that before Ji Kang was executed, he played his zither one last time, and regretted that the 'Guang-Ling Song' music would be lost forever after his death. The 'Guang-Ling Song' sure is wonderful, but how can it compare to the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song we just played? However, Ji Kang probably felt just the same like how we feel today."

"Big brother Qu, you were quite enlightened just minutes ago, how come you just turned rigid again?" Liu Zhengfeng smiled. "Our play of the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song, tonight, has brought out the best of the music. The music had already existed once in the world, and we have already played the song together once. What more could we ask for?"

"You are right!" Qu Yang clapped his hands gently. Then a short moment later, he sighed again.

"What's the matter, big brother? Ah, I see. You are worrying about Feifei," Liu Zhengfeng said.

"Feifei? Could that be the same Feifei?" Yilin thought to herself. Then, sure enough, she heard Qu Feiyan's voice.

"Grandpa, after Grandpa Liu and you gradually recover from your injuries, we'll wipe out every one of those Songshan villains and avenge granny Liu and the rest of them!"

Suddenly a long laugh rose from behind the rock wall. Amid the echoing of the loud laugh, a dark shadow had jumped out. Light of reflection flashed, and the next moment, a man appeared in front of Qu Yang and Liu Zhengfeng, holding a long sword in his hand. He was none other than the "Great Songyang Palm" Fei Bin of the Songshan Sword School.

"Hey, this little girl certainly likes to talk big. She wants to wipe out the entire Songshan Sword School. But I doubt

everything will go as you had wished,” Fei Bin said with a cold sneer.

“Fei Bin, you have already killed my entire family, and I could die any minute now thanks to the palm strikes from your two apprentice brothers. What else do you want?” Liu Zhengfeng stood up.

“Didn’t this little girl say to wipe everyone out? I am here to wipe everyone out!” he said with an arrogant grin. “Little girl, why don’t you come here, and be the first one to die?”

“Feifei and her grandpa saved your life. You have to think of something to save them!” Yilin pleaded Linghu Chong in whisper.

Even before she had said anything, Linghu Chong had already thought hard about ways to help them, thus repay the favor to the grandpa and granddaughter. But firstly, the opponent was an elite fighter of the Songshan Sword School; even if he hadn’t incurred any injuries, he still would be no match for Fei Bin. Secondly, he had already found out that Qu Yang was a member of the Demon Cult. The Huashan Sword School had always considered the Demon Cult an evil enemy. How could he help an enemy? The conflicting thoughts wavered in his mind, and he simply could not decide what to do.

“Fei Bin, you are a well known master in a famous sword school. Since Qu Yang and I are in your hands now, you can kill us or torture us all you want. But what would you become if you bully a little girl? Feifei, go! Leave!” Liu Zhengfeng urged.

“I’d rather die together with Grandpa and Grandpa Liu. I won’t live alone,” Qu Feiyan exclaimed.

“Hurry up! Go now!” Liu Zhengfeng urged again. “This is a matter between adults. It has nothing to do with a child like you.”

“I won’t go!” Qu Feiyan insisted.

Drawing two short swords by her waist, she rushed forth to hide Liu Zhengfeng behind her.

“Fei Bin, Grandpa Liu spared your life earlier, and now you are still requiting kindness with enmity. Aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” she shouted.

“You said you would wipe out our entire Songshan Sword School. Are you starting already? Do you expect me to just stand here and get slaughtered, or should I turn around and run away?” Fei Bin mocked in a chilling tone.

Liu Zhengfeng grabbed at Qu Feiyan’s arm. “Hurry up! Go now!” he said hastily. But because the shock from the Songshan style inner energy had broke his heart arteries, and the play of the “Smiling Proud Wanderer” had also used up his last bits of strength, the grab became so weak. With an easy pull, Qu Feiyan had freed her arm from Liu Zhengfeng’s hand.

Suddenly, reflections flashed in front of her eyes and Fei Bin’s long sword was already on its way toward Qu Feiyan’s face. She blocked the thrust with the left short sword and immediately thrust out the right short sword.

Fei Bin sneered as he circled his sword tip back and smacked it against Qu Feiyan’s sword in her right hand. A stream of numbness and pain shot through Qu Feiyan’s right palm and her entire right arm; the sword in her right hand flew out of her grip instantly. Fei Bin shook his sword in an angle and then poked backward. “Clank!” The sword in Qu Feiyan’s left hand was also knocked out and flew dozens of feet away. Before Qu Feiyan even had any chance to react, Fei Bin’s long sword was already pointed at her throat.

Fei Bin turned to Qu Yang, a cold grin on his face.

“Elder Qu, how about I first prick out your granddaughter’s left eye, then cut off her nose, and then cut off her two ears....”

Qu Feiyan screamed loudly. She jumped forward and threw herself at the long sword.

Fei Bin retracted the sword swiftly as he poke out with his right index finger, and Qu Feiyan fell to the ground like a rock.

Fei Bin burst into loud laughter. "You wicked demons," he yelled, "with so many crimes you have committed, I am not going to let you die this easy. Let me first prick out your left eye." He raised his sword and pierced it down toward Qu Feiyan's left eye.

"Hold it!" someone shouted from behind him suddenly. Astounded, Fei Bin quickly turned around and waved his sword about to block any possible attacks. He had no idea that Linghu Chong and Yilin were actually hidden behind the rocks even before he arrived; otherwise, with his outstanding Kung Fu skills, nobody could have sneaked behind him without him noticing it. Under the dim moonlight, he saw a young man standing still, his hands on his hips.

"Who are you?" Fei Bin asked in a yell.

"Linghu Chong of the Huashan Sword School here shows his respect to Uncle-Master Fei," Linghu Chong answered. He bowed to salute, but his body started shaking and he had a hard time keeping himself balance.

"Fine! So it's the senior apprentice of apprentice brother Yue." Fei Bin nodded. "What are you doing here?"

"I was injured by a Qingcheng apprentice, and was healing my wounds here, thus having the honor to meet you, Uncle-Master Fei."

"Hmm, it's perfect that you're here." Fei Bin snorted. "This little girl is an evil member of the Demon Cult. She deserves being executed. If I have to finish her off myself, it would look like a senior bullying a junior. You go ahead and kill her." He pointed at Qu Feiyan.

Linghu Chong shook his head. "This little girl's grandpa calls Uncle-Master Liu of the Hengshan Sword School a brother. So that would make her even one generation lower than I am. If I kill her, people would say that a Huashan Sword School senior bullied a junior. Once the news gets out, it probably wouldn't do much good for our reputation. Besides, this senior master Qu and Uncle-Master Liu are both badly wounded; to bully a junior of theirs right in front of

them wouldn't be the right kind of behavior for a true gentleman. Our Huashan Sword School certainly wouldn't do anything like that. Uncle-Master Fei, will you please pardon me?"

He had clearly implied that if the Songshan Sword School did the thing the Huashan Sword School disdained to do, that would obviously make the Songshan Sword School far less graceful than the Huashan Sword School.

Fei Bin knitted his brows, and a ferocious look appeared in his eyes.

"So you are secretly collaborating with the Demon Cult, too!" he bellowed in a stern voice. "That's right, Liu Zhengfeng mentioned earlier that this Demon Qu had helped with your wounds and saved your life. I certainly did not expect an impressive Huashan apprentice to have submitted himself to the Demon Cult so quickly."

The sword in his hand started to vibrate, and cold reflections flashed from the blade. He was about to thrust his sword at Linghu Chong.

"Nephew Linghu, you have nothing to do with this. There's no need for you to mix yourself up in this. You should leave quickly to avoid getting your Master into an awkward position," Liu Zhengfeng urged.

Linghu Chong laughed. "Uncle-Master Liu, we all consider ourselves part of the Chivalrous Side and irreconcilable with the Evil Side. What does the word 'chivalrous' really mean? Is it considered chivalrous to bully someone who has severe injuries? Is it considered chivalrous to kill an innocent little girl? If we were capable to lower ourselves to commit such deeds, what makes us different from the Evil Side?"

"Even our Demon Cult doesn't do things like that," Qu Yang said with a sigh, "Little brother Linghu, why don't you leave now? If the Songshan Sword School likes to do such things, then just let them do as they wish."

"I am not leaving!" Linghu Chong refused, a broad grin emerging on his lips. "'Great Songyang Palm' Hero Fei enjoys a great reputation in the Martial World. He is one of the best Masters in the Songshan Sword School. I am sure he was just trying to scare the little girl with harsh words. How could he actually commit such shameless deeds? Uncle-Master Fei is not that kind of guy." He folded his arms in front of his chest and leaned onto the trunk of a pine tree.

A strong wish to kill washed over Fei Bin, and he grinned hideously.

"You think you can just tie me up with your words, so I have to let these three devils walk free? Keep on dreaming! Well, since you have submitted yourself to the Demon Cult, what difference does it make for me to kill four instead of three?" He took a step forward.

Seeing the hideous look on his face, Linghu Chong was astounded, yet he kept the same face as he pondered hard for an idea to get out of trouble.

"Uncle-Master Fei, you are thinking about killing me to rid the witness, aren't you?" he asked.

"Hey, you're smart. That's right!" Fei Bin had no intention to deny. He took another step forward forcefully.

Suddenly, a young nun walked out from behind the rocks.

"Uncle-Master Fei, the sea of bitterness has no bounds; repent and the shore is at hand. You only have the intent to commit a crime, yet the crime has not been committed. It's still not too late to rein in at the brink of the precipice."

That was Yilin. Although Linghu Chong had instructed her to hide behind the rocks and not to let anyone see her, seeing the danger Linghu Chong was in, she immediately walked out without much thinking, hoping to convince Fei Bin to stop with her sincere advice.

Fei Bin was caught in great surprise. "You are from the Heng-Shan Sword School, right? Why are you hiding here in such a sneaky way?" he demanded.

"I...I...." Yilin blushed and could only murmur.

Qu Feiyan lay on the ground still. She could not move any of her limbs because of her sealed acupoints, but she could still talk.

"Sister Yilin," she shouted, "I knew you'd be together with big brother Linghu. So you did heal his wounds. Too bad...too bad we are all going to die soon."

"No, we won't." Yilin shook her head. "Uncle-Master Fei is a renowned hero in the Martial World. How could he hurt a severely wounded man or a little girl like you?"

"Is he really a renowned hero, a true man?" Qu Feiyan only sneered.

"The Songshan Sword School houses the Alliance Chief of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, the leader of the Chivalrous Side of the Martial World. They would, of course, follow the chivalrous rules first no matter what they do," Yilin emphasized.

She had really said those words sincerely and honestly, but in Fei Bin's ears, it all sounded like sarcastic ridicules. "In for a penny, in for a pound," he thought secretly. "If I let anyone of them leave here alive, my reputation would be ruined forever. Even though I am killing demons of the Demon Cult, killing wounded people and prisoners is not the kind of act of a true man, and will surely be looked down upon by others." At that thought, he pointed his sword at Yilin.

"You are neither severely wounded, nor a little girl that cannot move; I guess it's alright to kill you then."

Greatly stunned, Yilin took several steps back.

"Me...me...me? Why do you want to kill me?" in a trembling voice, she asked in disbelief.

"You ganged up with the demons of the Demon Cult. That little devil even called you a sister; you are obviously taking the demons' side. Of course I won't let you go." He took another step forward and was ready to thrust his sword at Yilin.

Linghu Chong hurriedly rushed in front of Yilin, hiding her behind him. "Apprentice sister, run! Quick! Ask your Master to come save us," he shouted loudly. He knew clearly that water a mile away wouldn't extinguish the fire close by. Asking Yilin to go seek help was just another excuse to get her out of here, staying away from danger.

Fei Bin waved his sword and thrust the tip of the blade toward Linghu Chong's right shoulder, which Linghu Chong dodged by turning to the side hurriedly, then, Fei Bin thrust out three more continuous moves, which Linghu Chong was only able to escape barely.

Yilin was extremely worried. She drew the broken sword by her waist in a hurry and thrust it at Fei Bin's shoulder.

"Big brother Linghu, you have injuries. Stay back!" she shouted.

"I see. The little nun has forgotten about all the prohibitions. After seeing a handsome lad, she doesn't even care about her own life any more." Fei Bin let out a stream of laughter. He slashed his sword straight down. "Clank!" The two swords collided and Yilin's broken sword was instantly knocked out of her grip. Fei Bin pushed his sword forward, and the sword headed straight toward Yilin's heart.

Fei Bin figured that he had as many as five people to kill. Even though none of them could really put up a decent fight with him, but a long delay would mean many hitches, and he couldn't afford to let any one of them escape, otherwise, there would be endless trouble. That was why he was so determined to use deadly moves.

Linghu Chong jumped on Fei Bin, poking two fingers of his left hand at Fei Bin's eyes. Fei Bin pushed the ground with his toes and leapt backward, slicing his sword conveniently following his body movements, which left a long cut on Linghu Chong's left arm.

Linghu Chong's fierce attack with disregard to his own life saved Yilin from being stabbed, but it also exhausted all



his strength that he could hardly breathe, his body trembling hard, as if he could collapse any second.

Yilin rushed forward and held onto his arms. "He will have to kill the both of us!" she exclaimed in a sobbing voice.

"Run...run away now...hurry up...!" although totally out of breath, Linghu Chong managed to squeeze out these words.

"You dummy!" Qu Feiyan grinned. "Don't you understand what she wants? She wants to die with you...!" Before she could finish, Fei Bin's sword had already penetrated her heart.

Qu Yang, Liu Zhengfeng, Linghu Chong, and Yilin all screamed in disbelief.

With a hideous grin on his face, Fei Bin slowly took a step toward Linghu Chong and Yilin, then another step, then another. Blood dripped down from the tip of the sword one drop after another.

Linghu Chong's mind fell into a state of chaos: "He...he actually killed the little girl. How vicious! I am going to die, too. Why does apprentice sister Yilin want to die together with me? Yes, I've saved her before, but she has saved me, too, and has repaid the favor she owed me. I had never known her before. We are just apprentice brother and sister of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. There is of course the code of honor in the Martial World, but she doesn't have to sacrifice her life for that. I'd never thought an apprentice of the Heng-Shan Sword School would take brotherhood of the Martial World so seriously. Sister Dingyi must be a remarkable person. Ah, it's this apprentice sister Yilin who will die together with me, not my little apprentice sister Lingshan. Talking about Lingshan, what is she...doing right now?" With a gentle sigh and a slight smile, he shut his eyes tight and completely ignored the dreadful face of Fei Bin that was getting closer and closer.

All of a sudden, several faint sounds of a huqin came into his ears. The tone was filled with sadness, almost sounded

like a sigh, yet also sounded like a sob. The sounds quivered, like drops of rain falling on leaves. Very surprised, Linghu Chong opened his eyes.

A shock went through Fei Bin's heart: "'Night Rain of Xiaoxiang' Great Mr. Mo is here."

The music played by the huqin became even more depressing, but Great Mr. Mo remained behind the trees.

"Great Mr. Mo, why don't you come out?" Fei Bin yelled.

Music from the huqin stopped. A thin figure walked out from behind a pine tree. Linghu Chong had long heard of the fame of "Night Rain of Xiaoxiang" Great Mr. Mo, but he had never seen him in person before. Now in the dim moonlight, he could see a man standing in front of Fei Bin. He was so thin that he was mere skeleton, and his back arched badly. He looked almost like someone who was so ill that he could collapse down and die any second. Who would have thought that the well-known Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School had such a wretched appearance?

Great Mr. Mo cupped his hands toward Fei Bin, still holding the huqin in his left hand. "Apprentice brother Fei! How is Alliance Chief Zuo?" he greeted.

Seeing that Great Mr. Mo hadn't come with any ill intentions, and also knowing that he didn't get along with Liu Zhengfeng, Fei Bin answered, "Thanks for asking, Great Mr. Mo. My apprentice brother Zuo is just fine. Liu Zhengfeng of your respectful school collaborated with the Demon Cult and had plotted against our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. Great Mr. Mo, what do you think we should do?"

Great Mr. Mo took two steps toward Liu Zhengfeng and said in a chilling tone, "We should kill!" Right after the word "kill," a thin and narrow long sword appeared in his hand out of nowhere. Cold reflections flashed when he thrust the sword hard backward; the tip of the blade went straight toward Fei Bin's chest. His sudden attack was so fast and swift that it almost looked unreal. That was one of the unique

moves of the “Magical Thirteen Phantom Stances of Hengshan Mist.”

Fei Bin had fallen for this unique style of Kung Fu from Liu Zhengfeng earlier in Liu House, and now he fell for it again. In great astonishment, he jumped back as quickly as he could, but it was still not quick enough. In a tearing sound, the sword sliced across his chest; his robe was cut open and a long cut appeared on his chest. Although the wound was nothing serious, because of his surprise and anger, he had lost his edge in spirit.

Fei Bin immediately started his own attack, but Great Mr. Mo had taken control of the initiative with his first move, and his attacks poured out continuously, one wave after another. The thin sword twisted and vibrated like a serpent, flying swiftly in between Fei Bin’s sword flashes. Fei Bin was forced to retreat back a step, then another, without a chance to utter a cry or swear.

Qu Yang, Liu Zhengfeng, and Linghu Chong were all taken aback by the magical and ghost-like sword moves of Great Mr. Mo. Liu Zhengfeng had studied with him in the same school, and had been his apprentice brother for decades, but even he did not expect such outstanding and magnificent sword skills out of him.

Drops of blood splashed out between the two swords. Fei Bin jumped and dodged and ducked, trying his best to block away the attacks, but he still couldn’t escape the cage of light created by Great Mr. Mo’s fast sword. The splashing blood gradually made a red circle around them.

Suddenly, Fei Bin uttered a long scream and jumped high in the air as Great Mr. Mo took a few steps back. Shoving his sword into the huqin, Great Mr. Mo turned on his heels and strolled away. A song of “Night Rain of Xiaoxiang” rose from behind the pine trees, and soon the music faded into the distance.

Fei Bin collapsed onto the ground after his jump. Blood sprang out from his chest and up into the air like a fountain.

In the fierce fight, he had loaded the Songsan style inner energy. When his chest was stabbed, the inner energy was still circling inside his body, and started pumping blood out from the wound. Such a scene was strange yet horrifying.

Yilin held onto Linghu Chong's arm, her heart thumping like a drum. "You didn't get injured again, did you?" she asked in whisper.

Qu Yang heaved a sigh. "Brother Liu, you had mentioned before that you don't get along with your apprentice brother. Who would have thought that he would save us when we are in danger."

"My apprentice brother always behaves in such odd ways. I really have no idea beforehand what he might do. We don't get along. It has nothing to do with the fact that I'm rich and he's poor. It's just that our temperaments don't agree with each other," Liu Zhengfeng explained.

"His sword skills are so outstanding, but the music he played with his huqin only showed sadness and depression that will move the audience into tears. His music play is too vulgar; he still cannot get rid of the sordid street tone in his music." Qu Yang shook his head.

"Exactly!" Liu Zhengfeng couldn't agree more. "Apprentice brother's huqin play has no circulation in the chords, and the tone always goes far too deep into the sadness. Good poems have regards about joyful but not fancy, sad yet not depressing. What's so different about music? Every time when I hear his huqin play, all I want to do is to run as far away as possible from it."

Linghu Chong couldn't help thinking to himself, "These two are simply obsessed with music. Even in such a life threatening situation, all they could think of are 'sad yet not depressing' and 'vulgar versus graceful.' If it weren't Uncle-Master Mo who got here in time, we would all be dead. What a pity that the little girl Qu had to be murdered by Fei Bin."

Liu Zhengfeng continued. "But regarding sword skills and Kung Fu skills, I am really far behind. In the old days, I

haven't really showed a lot of respect for him. Now when I think about it, I truly regret it myself."

"The Head Master of the Hengshan Sword School really lives up to his reputation." Qu Yang nodded in agreement. He turned to Linghu Chong. "Little brother, I have a favor to ask of you. Will you do me this favor?"

"Senior Master, please! Of course I will," Linghu Chong answered.

Qu Yang cast a side-glance at Liu Zhengfeng and then said, "Brother Liu and I love music to the extreme. We spent several years writing this song called 'Smiling Proud Wanderer.' We believe this piece of music is so unique that during the past millennium, there was nothing even close to it. From now on, even if there will be someone like Qu Yang again, there might not be a Liu Zhengfeng; if there will be someone like Liu Zhengfeng, there might not be a Qu Yang. If there will be people like Qu Yang and Liu Zhengfeng, the two of them might not be born during the same period of time to meet and become friends. To find two who are good not only in music, but also in inner energy, yet have the same tastes and similar level of Kung Fu skills, to create a piece of music like this, is more difficult than finding a needle in a hay stack. If this piece of ultimate music gets buried into oblivion, brother Liu and I will undoubtedly sigh with regret in the underworld." Taking a book of manuscripts out from his chest pocket, he continued, "This is the music score of the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song. Little brother, for the sake of the great devotion and efforts the two of us put in this, will you please find the right kind of people to give this to?"

"If the world gets to know the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song, then big brother Qu and I will be able to die content," Liu Zhengfeng added.

Linghu Chong bowed and took the music score manuscripts from Qu Yang with both of his hands, and put it into his own pocket.

“Please rest assured. I will definitely try my best,” he promised.

When Qu Yang had said that he had a favor to ask of him earlier, Linghu Chong thought it was going to be something very difficult and dangerous. He also worried that to accomplish such a task might require action that would violate his school rules and offend fellow martial people in chivalrous schools. But he really could not refuse in the circumstance by then. Learning now that all they wanted was for him to find two guys to play zither and flute, he immediately felt much relaxed, and heaved a sigh of relief.

“Nephew Linghu, this piece of music not only is the ultimate lifelong work of the two of us, it is also related to a historical figure. A good amount of the melody in the ‘Smiling Proud Wanderer’ song was modified by big brother Qu Yang based on the Jin Dynasty musician Ji Kang’s ‘Guang-Ling Song’,” Liu Zhengfeng elaborated.

Qu Yang was quite proud of himself for this one. “It has always been said that after Ji Kang had died, the ‘Guang-Ling Song’ was lost for ever. Do you have any idea where I got it?” he beamed at Linghu Chong.

“I don’t have the slightest idea about music. And since you two do things so differently from other people, how would I have any clue about the answer?” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “Senior Master, will you please tell us?” he requested.

Qu Yang grinned. “Ji Kang was a very interesting guy. According to history books, he liked to ‘speak with magnificent style, quoting from Lao and Zhuang<sup>46</sup> and enjoying the company of unusual people.’ His character was the type that I would have gotten along with. Zhong Hui was a high official at that time. Hearing about Ji Kang’s great reputation, he went to visit Ji Kang, but Ji Kang just went on with his blacksmith work, and paid no attention to him. Put out by Ji Kang’s indifference, Zhong Hui had to leave. Ji Kang asked him, ‘what did you hear before you came, and what did

you see before you leave?’ Zhong Hui answered, ‘I heard what I heard before I came, and I saw what I saw before I leave.’ Zhong Hui the fellow was really a smart guy, but he was too narrow-minded. Because of this embarrassing encounter, he became angry and spoke ill of Ji Kang to Sima Zhao.<sup>47</sup> Sima Zhao then ordered Ji Kang to be killed. Before Ji Kang was executed, he played a song with zither. That was really a good display of elegance. But when he said that the ‘Guang-Ling Song would be lost for ever from now on,’ he really underestimated everybody after his generation. He wasn’t the composer of this piece of music. He lived during the Western Jin Dynasty, even if it really became extinct after the Western Jin Dynasty, what about the dynasties before the Western Jin Dynasty?”

Linghu Chong was confused. “Before the Western Jin Dynasty?” he repeated in a mutter.

“Yep!” Qu Yang nodded. “I really didn’t agree with that comment of his, so I started digging in the tombs of Emperors and high officials in Western Han Dynasty and Eastern Han Dynasty. After digging in twenty-nine different ancient tombs, I finally found the music score manuscripts in Cai Yi’s tomb.” He burst into loud laughter and was very content with himself.

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded: “Just for the manuscripts of a single piece of music, this Senior Master actually dug into twenty-nine different tombs.”

Qu Yang’s smile gradually disappeared, and a bit of depression climbed onto his face. “Little brother,” he said, “I know you are the senior apprentice of a famous chivalrous school, and I really shouldn’t be asking you for this favor, but in such urgency, I really have no other choice but to get you involved. Please pardon me.” Then he turned to Liu Zhengfeng. “Brother, we can go now.”

“Right!” Liu Zhengfeng answered and extended his hand out.

The two grabbed hold of each other's hand and laughed loudly. Amid the loud laughter, both gathered the remaining inner energy still left in them and burst the main arteries in their bodies. Within seconds, both shut their eyes tightly and passed away.

"Senior Master! Uncle-Master Liu!" Linghu Chong shouted in shock and reached out to check the two's breathing, but found none.

"They...they are all dead?" Yilin asked in shock, and Linghu Chong answered with a nod.

"Apprentice sister, let's bury the four bodies quickly, in case someone comes over searching for them and causes more trouble. We must under no circumstances ever let out the news that Great Mr. Mo killed Fei Bin." He lowered his voice and said, "If this ever gets leaked out, Great Mr. Mo would know for sure that it was us who leaked the news. That would create major problems."

"Yes," Yilin agreed. "But what if my Master asks about it? Should I tell?"

"You can't tell any one. If you ever tell this to your Master and Great Mr. Mo comes to pick a sword fight with your Master, that would be disastrous," Linghu Chong emphasized.

Remembering the outstanding and magical sword skills that Great Mr. Mo had demonstrated earlier, Yilin couldn't help but shiver. "I won't tell," she promised hurriedly.

Linghu Chong slowly bent over to pick up Fei Bin's long sword, and then started poking holes on Fei Bin's dead body with it. Yilin didn't have the heart to watch.

"Big brother Linghu, he is already dead, why do you still hate him so much and want to torture his dead body?" she asked hesitantly.

"Great Mr. Mo's sword is very thin and narrow. It would take a master no time to figure out who had executed the kill by checking the wounds on Uncle-Master Fei's dead body. I am not torturing his dead body; I am just messing up every



wounds on his body, so no one would be able to tell,” Linghu Chong explained.

Yilin gasped. “Why are there so many schemes in the Martial World? It’s really...really difficult,” she couldn’t help thinking.

Seeing that Linghu Chong had thrown down the long sword and was picking up stones to throw on top of Fei Bin’s body, she said hurriedly, “Don’t work too hard. Why don’t you sit down? Let me do it.” Picking up a stone, she placed it on Fei Bin’s body, so gently as if the body still had senses and could feel the pain because of the stones.

Yilin kept on picking up stones and soon covered the four bodies of Liu Zhengfeng and the others. Affectionately placing one more stone on Qu Feiyan’s grave, she murmured.

“Little sister, if it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t have to suffer so much pain. I wish you would ascend into the Heaven to enjoy all the happy things, and then in your next life, get reborn as a male, performing many charitable and pious deeds, so eventually you would be able to enter the western paradise. May the merciful Buddha preserve us all....”

Linghu Chong sat on the ground leaning against a rock. Thinking about how Qu Feiyan had saved his life, yet had to die a terrible death at such a young age, he couldn’t help but feel sad. Even though he never believed in Buddhism, he still recited some ‘may the merciful Buddha preserve us all’ together with Yilin.

After some good rest, the pain from Linghu Chong’s wounds lightened, so he took the book of manuscripts of the “Smiling Proud Wanderer” music score out from his pocket and opened it up. The book was filled with strange symbols, and he didn’t even know a single one of them. His reading capabilities were very limited. Having no idea that music scores all used this kind of strange symbols, he thought that these were difficult words and characters he had never learned before. So he put the music book back into his robe

pocket. He raised his head slightly while taking a deep breath, thinking, "Uncle-Master Liu had given up everything, including his own life, for his friend. Even though the friend was an Elder in the Demon Cult, both of them showed zealous passion and great courage, and deserved to be called true men. They are so admirable! I thought Uncle-Master Liu was going to have his 'Gold Basin Hand Washing' ceremony, and quit the Martial World today. What really happened? How did he become an enemy of the Songshan Sword School? How strange?"

Still lost in his wild imagination, Linghu Chong suddenly noticed some flashes of sword reflections from the northwest corner in the distance. The sword moves looked very familiar. It seemed that an elite fighter in his own sword school was in a sword fight with someone else. A shiver ran through his heart.

"Apprentice sister, wait here for a while. I will be right back," he muttered to Yilin,

Yilin was still working on piling the stones for the graves, and didn't even notice the sword flashes. She thought Linghu Chong was just in need of nature's call, so she nodded.

Using a fallen branch as his crutch, Linghu Chong stepped forward. Picking up Fei Bin's long sword on his way, he hung it by his waist, and then walked toward the direction of the sword flashes. After a short while, he could already vaguely hear the weapons colliding noises. The noises were so dense that they sounded nonstop; obviously it was a fierce fight.

"Which senior master in our school is in the fight?" he asked himself. "The fight has lasted for quite a while. Apparently the opponent is an elite fighter, too."

He bent his back and slowly sneaked closer. Hearing the colliding sounds get louder, he knew he was already very close to the scene, so he hid behind a big tree and peeked out. In the bright moonlight, he could make out a scholarly looking man standing in the middle of the open field, holding

a long sword. It was his Master, Yue Buqun. A short Taoist priest circled around Yue Buqun in blazing speed and continuously thrust his sword toward him. In the time of one circle, he would have made over a dozen thrusts. This man was the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School, Yu Canghai.

Seeing his Master in a fight with someone so unexpectedly, and the opponent being the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School, Linghu Chong felt very excited. He could tell that his Master fought in a very relaxed and graceful way. Every time when Yu Canghai thrust his sword out, Yue Buqun would simply block it leisurely. When Yu Canghai circled behind his back, he didn't turn around, but only waved his sword to protect his back. Yu Canghai's sword attacks became faster and faster, yet Yue Buqun only defended and didn't attack back.

Linghu Chong watched on with great admiration. "Master's nickname is 'Gentleman Sword,' and he really is behaving like a polite, graceful, and elegant gentleman. Even when he is in a fight with someone, he didn't show any trace of violent brutality, none whatsoever." He watched some more and then thought, "Master is able to control his temper well because he has not only poise, but also outstanding Kung Fu skills."

Yue Buqun rarely got into fights with anyone. In normal days when Linghu Chong watched him fight, it would always be a demonstration fight with Master-Wife for the apprentices. Those were all fake fights. But this time it was a real one, so of course it was quite different from all the demonstration fights.

Linghu Chong could hear the whistles made by Yu Canghai's sword every time he thrust the sword out, clearly showing the great strength behind each sword attack. "I've always looked down upon the Qingcheng Sword School. But this short Taoist priest actually is a very tough opponent! Even if I were healthy, I still wouldn't last one minute fighting

against him. The next time I meet him again, I'd better watch out for myself. The best thing to do would be keeping a safe distance from him." Linghu Chong told himself inwardly as he went on watching.

By then, Yu Canghai had accelerated his circling around Yue Buqun. It almost looked as if a purple shadow had surrounded Yue Buqun and was rotating around him. The noises of swords colliding into each other had become so dense that all the sounds echoed continuously, and making a long ringing sound.

Linghu Chong couldn't help but think, "If those dozens of attacks were aimed at me, I probably won't be able to block a single one, and would end up enjoying dozens of holes in my body. This short Taoist priest probably has even better Kung Fu than Tian Boguang."

Seeing that his Master still was not attacking back, he became worried. "That short Taoist Priest's sword skills are so stunning, I hope Master won't lose to him because of any small oversight."

Suddenly a loud "ring" echoed in the air, and Yu Canghai had slid back like a shooting arrow. He stopped at about a dozen feet away and stood there still; Linghu Chong didn't even catch a glimpse of him shoving his sword back to his sheath. Greatly astonished, Linghu Chong immediately glanced at his Master. Yue Buqun had also put his sword back into the sheath and just stood there quietly. The change happened in such an abrupt manner that Linghu Chong had no idea who had won and who had lost the fight. He wasn't even sure if anyone had been injured internally or not.

For a moment, the two just stood there quietly, then eventually Yu Canghai sneered coldly, "Very well! I am sure we will meet again!" After these words, he sprinted toward his right side without any further delay.

"Master Yu, wait!" Yue Buqun yelled loudly. "What about the Lin Couple?" He quickly chased after Yu Canghai

following the same direction. Before their voices faded down, the two had vanished from sight.

From the dialogue between the two, Linghu Chong could tell that his Master had won the fight with Yu Canghai. He couldn't help but feel great joy. But because of all his wounds and all the excitement, fatigue soon started to sink in, and he felt totally exhausted.

"Ah, Master has gone after Yu Canghai. With the level of Qing-Gong they have, they are probably a mile away by now!" he thought.

He leaned on his crutch and started walking back to meet Yilin again when suddenly a long scream floated out from within the woods to his left. The scream sounded miserable. Astounded, Linghu Chong took several steps toward the woods. A yellow wall could vaguely be seen behind the trees, and it looked like the kind of wall of a temple. Fearing that his fellow apprentices of the Huashan Sword School might be injured in fights with the Qingcheng apprentices, he strode in the direction of the yellow wall. When he was only about dozens of feet away from the temple, he heard an old and shrill voice speaking from inside the temple.

"Where is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'? If you tell me where it is with no tricks, then I promise to wipe out the entire Qingcheng Sword School for you, and avenge the couple of you two."

Linghu Chong had heard this voice before. That was when he was on the bed in "Jade House." So he recognized the man easily. It was "Hunchback of the North" Mu Gaofeng.

"Master is looking for the whereabouts of the Lin Couple right this moment. Turned out the two actually are in the hands of Mu Gaofeng!" he thought to himself.

"I don't know if there is actually an 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'," a man's voice replied. "The sword art of our Lin family had always been passed down orally throughout the generations. I've never seen a sword art manuscript."

"This one must be apprentice brother Lin's father, the Chief Escort of the Fortune Prestige Escort House - Lin Zhennan," Linghu Chong told himself.

Then the voice continued, "Senior Master, I thank you for considering seeking revenge for us. Yu Canghai of the Qingcheng Sword School had committed so many evil crimes; he will definitely have a terrible death. Even if he could escape you, Senior Master, he would die under someone else's blade for sure."

"Are you saying that you are determined to keep this to yourself? I am sure you've heard about the reputation of the 'Hunchback of the North' before, haven't you?" Mu Gaofeng screeched with a threatening tone.

"Of course everyone knows about your great reputation, Senior Master Mu," Lin Zhennan answered.

"Excellent! Excellent!" Mu Gaofeng said. "I wouldn't call it a great reputation, but you probably have heard about how cruel and merciless I can be, haven't you?"

"I knew you would be torturing me, Senior Master Mu. Even if we really had the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' I would have never given that out no matter how others combine threats with inducements. Ever since I was taken prisoner by the Qingcheng Sword School, I've been tortured every single day. I don't have high Kung Fu skills, but I do have some hard bones," Lin Zhennan said firmly.

"Well, well, very well!" Mu Gaofeng pondered upon himself.

Outside the temple, Linghu Chong thought to himself, "Why is he saying 'well, very well?' Oh, I see. That's why!" Then he heard Mu Gaofeng's voice again.

"You claim that you have hard bones and can take tortures. The short bull-nose of the Qingcheng Sword School tortured you left and right, and you still didn't let the words out. If your Lin family never had the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' then you would simply have no words to let out, and wouldn't have to rely on your hard bones. I see. You do

have the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' You just won't give it out no matter what."

After a short while, he heaved a sigh. "You are really dumb, you know that?" he muttered. "Chief Master Lin, why won't you give the sword art manuscript up? The sword art manuscript won't do you any good. You know what I think? I think the sword arts recorded on that sword art manuscript must be really ordinary. Otherwise why you cannot even beat a couple of Qingcheng apprentices? This type of sword art skills is really not worth mentioning, you know what I am saying?"

"That's right! Senior Master Mu, you said it right! Even if I really had this 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' such ordinary good-for-nothing sword art wouldn't even enable one to protect his own life, why in the world would you, Senior Master Mu, be interested in it?" Lin Zhennan said.

"I am only curious," Mu Gaofeng said. "Since that short bull-nose made such a fuss about it and dragged in so many people to pressure you, there's got be something strange here. Maybe the sword art recorded in that sword manuscript is really high-level stuff; it's just that you are too stupid to understand it, and had to bring disgrace to the ancestors of your Lin Family. Why don't you take it out and let me, a senior master, have a look at it, and point out all the advantages and good tricks of your Lin family's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art', so everyone in the Martial World will know about them? Wouldn't that be better for your Lin family's reputation, too?"

"Thanks for your kind regard, Senior Master Mu," Lin Zhennan answered. "Why don't you search me and see if I really have the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?"

"Nah, no need for that!" Mu Gaofeng declined. "You've been the Qingcheng Sword School's prisoner for many days. They must have frisked you up and down dozens of times. Chief Master Lin, you are really dumb. Did you know that?"

"I am really dumb. I've got that part figured out a long time ago. I don't need others to point that out for me," Lin Zhennan responded.

"Well, you don't understand, but maybe Mrs. Lin will. Who knows? Mothers tend to love their kids more than fathers," Mu Gaofeng said.

"What are you talking about? What has it got anything to do with my Pingzhi? What happened to him? Where...where is he?" Mrs. Lin shrieked.

"The lad Lin Pingzhi is quite bright. I liked him the first moment when I laid my eyes on him. That kid surely knows how to behave himself. He knows that my Kung Fu skills are tough, so he had submitted himself to be my apprentice," Mu Gaofeng said.

"So my son had asked you to be his Master, Senior Master Mu? That's really his good fortune. Because of injuries from the cruel tortures, the two of us could die any moment now. Will you please call our son over to see us one last time?" Lin Zhennan asked.

"It is only natural that you want your son to attend upon dying parents. That's easy." Mu Gaofeng smirked.

"Where is Pingzhi? Senior Master Mu, I beg of you! Please ask our son to come. I'll never forget your kindness," Mrs. Lin pleaded.

"Very well! I'll go get him right away. But Mu Gaofeng never likes to be ordered around by others. To get your son here is as easy as falling off a log, but you'll have to first tell me the whereabouts of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' truthfully."

"If you don't believe me, there's really nothing I can do to convince you. The two of us are already on the verge of dying; all we want is to have one last look at our son. If there were really an 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' I would have asked you to tell my son without your asking about it." Lin Zhennan sighed.



“That’s exactly why I think you are dumb,” Mu Gaofeng explained. “Your heart arteries are already busted. I don’t even have to touch you with a little finger; you’d be dead, anyway. You simply won’t last another hour, why are you so stubborn and simply refuse to tell me where the sword art manuscript is? Obviously, it’s because you want to reserve the Lin family Kung Fu that was passed down from your ancestors. But after you are dead, Lin Pingzhi would be all there is left in the Lin family. If he’s dead too, then there’s this sword manuscript, but there won’t be any Lin family’s descendents left to practice it; what good would that do your Lin family to leave the sword manuscript in this world?”

“Is my son...my son alright?” Mrs. Lin asked in terror.

“Right now, of course he is alright. Once you tell me where the sword art manuscript is, and after I get it, I promise I will give it to your son. And when he has questions when he studies it, I can also give him some good pointers, so he won’t be like his dad, Master Chief Lin, who studied the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ for his entire life and still had no clue about how to use it whatsoever. Wouldn’t that be a better choice than smashing him dead with a knife hand chop?” Smashing sounds rose from inside the temple. Apparently he had just smashed some big object into pieces.

“Why...why do you want to smash him dead?” Mrs. Lin asked fearfully.

Mu Gaofeng burst into loud laughter. “Lin Pingzhi is my apprentice. If I want him alive, he will stay alive. If I want him dead, he will die. Anytime I feel like smashing him dead, all I need to do is to raise my hand.” Some more smashing sounds came. He had smashed some more things.

“Wife, enough talks. He doesn’t have our son, otherwise, why wouldn’t he bring him here and threaten to kill him right in front of our eyes?” Lin Zhennan said.

Mu Gaofeng laughed out loud. He said, “I said you were dumb, and you really, really are dumb. If the ‘Hunchback of the North’ wants to kill your son, is it that hard? Let’s assume

that he is not in my hands right now, but if I am really determined to find him and whack him, you really think it's going to be that difficult for me? I have friends and information sources all over the Martial World. To find your darling baby son is like a piece of cake."

"Husband, if he really decides to give our son trouble...." Mrs. Lin said to Lin Zhennan in a low voice.

"Yeah! Once you tell me, even if the both of you cannot survive, you still have Lin Pingzhi to carry on with your name. Wouldn't that be nice?" Mu Gaofeng encouraged.

Lin Zhennan laughed. "Wife, if we tell him where the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' is, the first thing he'll do is get the sword art manuscript; the second thing on the list will be to kill our son. If we don't tell him, in order to get the sword art manuscript, the hunchback would have no other choice but to protect Pingzhi's life. As long as Pingzhi doesn't tell him, the hunchback would never dare to harm him. You must understand the trick here."

"You are right!" Mrs. Lin said in agreement. "Hunchback, go ahead and kill us," she yelled at Mu Gaofeng.

By then, Linghu Chong knew that Mu Gaofeng must be infuriated. If he couldn't figure out a way to draw Mu Gaofeng away, then the Lin couple would be dead in no time for sure. So he said loudly, "Senior Master Mu, following my Master's order, Huashan Sword School apprentice Linghu Chong here invites Senior Master Mu to come out. We have something important to discuss with you."

In great rage, Mu Gaofeng had raised his hand, ready to strike down on Lin Zhennan's head, when he suddenly heard the words from Linghu Chong outside of the temple. He was dumfounded. It was rare for him to ever give ways to others, but the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, Yue Buqun, surely made him think twice, especially after his dreadful encounter with the "Divine Art of Violet Twilight" of Yue Buqun outside of the "Jade House" the other day. Probably Yue Buqun and his apprentices had been

eavesdropping outside the temple for quite a while when he threatened the Lin couple. That type of deeds was really looked down upon by all the chivalrous schools.

"Yue Buqun asked me out to discuss something? He will probably pretend to make peace between the Lin couple and I, while actually casting sarcastic remarks. A wise man will never put himself in a disadvantageous situation. I'd better take off now," he told himself.

"Sorry," he said after making up his mind, "I really don't have any time. I already have previous arrangements. Please tell your Master that whenever he gets some free time, he is welcome to visit me near the northern border. I will be humbly awaiting for him!"

He jumped out of the hall into the courtyard. Pressing hard on the ground with his left foot, he had jumped up the roof and then down to the back of the temple. Afraid to be stopped and questioned by Yue Buqun, he disappeared in an instant.

Hearing that Mu Gaofeng had fled, Linghu Chong was so glad. "Wow, this hunchback is really scared of my Master. If he hadn't run away and decided to fight me, I wouldn't stand a chance."

With the help of the branch, he slowly walked into the tiny temple housing the village god. The hall was enveloped in darkness. There was no lights or candles. He could only make out two shadows of a man and a woman sitting on the floor leaning against each other.

"I am Linghu Chong of the Huashan Sword School. Apprentice brother Pingzhi has also joined our sword school just recently. I am here to pay my respect to Uncle Lin and Auntie Lin," he said with a bow.

Lin Zhennan burst with joy. "Young sir, you are really flattering us. We are both injured severely, so please pardon us for greeting back. Is our son really an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School's Hero Yue now?" His voice trembled in the last couple of words.

Yue Buqun had a much bigger fame in the Martial World than Yu Canghai. Every year, Lin Zhennan had been sending presents to the Qingcheng Sword School to fawn on Yu Canghai, but he dared not to send any present to the Huashan Sword School, knowing that he would be in no position to make friends with one of the Head Masters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. Now seeing that even such a ferocious Mu Gaofeng fled as soon as he heard the name of the Huashan Sword School mentioned, and his son so fortunate to have become an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, he found himself in high spirits and his heart filled with joy.

“Yes,” Linghu Chong answered. “The hunchback Mu Gaofeng was forcing your son to become his apprentice, but your son simply wouldn’t agree. The hunchback got mad and was about to harm your son when my Master happened to be passing by. So Master was able to save him. Your son begged Master sincerely to take him in as an apprentice. Seeing his sincerity and that he would make a good apprentice, Master did not object. Earlier Master just had a sword fight with Yu Canghai and defeated him in the fight. Yu Canghai ran away, and Master chased after him in order to get the whereabouts of you two, Uncle and Auntie. But he didn’t know that you two are actually right here.”

“I wish...wish Pingzhi could get here soon. We don’t have much time left.” Lin Zhennan murmured. He breathed hard, but it still seemed that more air was breathed out than in; he was really on the threshold of meeting death.

“Uncle Lin, don’t talk. After my Master takes care of the business with Yu Canghai, he’ll come back looking for you. The respectful Master must have a way to heal you,” Linghu Chong comforted him.

Lin Zhennan let out a wry smile and then closed his eyes. After a few moments, he spoke again in a low voice, “Little brother Linghu, I...I...I am not going to make it. I am overjoyed to know that Pingzhi was taken into the Huashan

Sword School. Will you...you please help take care...care of him?"

"Uncle, please don't worry. Apprentice brother Lin will be studying together with us, and we will be like brothers in a family. I will put in extra effort to take good care of him," Linghu Chong assured him.

"Thanks to your great kindness, we will be remembering it even after we head to the underworld," Mrs. Lin cut in.

"Please, don't talk much. Concentrate on your breathing and you will feel better," Linghu Chong suggested.

Lin Zhennan appeared to be short of breath. Disjointedly, he said, "Will you...will you please tell my son? The thing in the basement of the old Lin House in the Xiang-Yang Alley of Fuzhou has...has been handed down in the family from generation to generation. He must...he must take good care of it. But...but his great grandfather Sir Yuantu had said in his last words: 'for all my descendents, you shall never read it, or great misfortune will fall upon you.' Please tell...tell him to remember that well."

Linghu Chong nodded. "All right! I will take the message to him," he promised.

Lin Zhennan murmured, "Many...many...many...." The word "thanks" never made it out of his mouth before he fell dead.

Wishing to see his son one last time and tell him these important words himself, Lin Zhennan had been struggling to hold out. Now after Linghu Chong gave his word that he would take the message, and knowing his son had found such a good home, in great joy, he had no regrets left. As soon as he gave up on the struggle, he departed with the living world.

"Young hero Linghu," Mrs. Lin said, "I hope you will tell my son never to forget seeking revenge for his parents." She threw herself toward the stone steps under the columns of the temple and bumped her head hard onto one of the steps. With her previous fatal injuries, the bump killed her instantly.

Linghu Chong heaved a deep sigh, and couldn't help thinking to himself, "Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng both tried to force the whereabouts of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' out from Lin Zhennan, but he would rather die than speak out the secret. Only when he knew he was going to die right away, he had no choice but to ask me to take a message. But he still feared that I would go take out the sword art manuscript of his Lin family, so he said something like 'you shall never read it, or great misfortune will fall upon you.' Humph, what kind of person did you think Linghu Chong was? Did you actually think I would covet the sword art manuscript of your Lin family? You were really worrying yourself for nothing...?"

By then he was totally exhausted, so he sat down leaning against a column and rested with his eyes shut.

A good while passed when Yue Buqun's voice finally rose outside the temple, "Let's check out this temple."

"Master, Master!" Linghu Chong shouted out loud.

"Is that Chong?" Yue Buqun asked in delight.

"Yes, it's me!" Linghu Chong answered. He propped himself up slowly against the column.

It was already near dawn, so when Yue Buqun entered the temple, he easily spotted the bodies of the Lin Couple. "Are they Chief Master Lin and his wife?" he asked with a frown.

"Yes." Linghu Chong answered and then went ahead and told everything: how Mu Gaofeng had compelled the Lin couple, and how he scared Mu Gaofeng off but the Lin couple still died because of the injuries. He also told his Master the last words of Lin Zhennan.

"Ah, Yu Canghai had really committed some terrible sins this time, yet he got nothing," Yue Buqun muttered to himself.

"Master, did that dwarf Yu asked you for mercy?" Linghu Chong asked in an excited tone.

“Master Yu has very fast legs. I chased him for quite some time, yet was only getting further and further behind him. The Qing-Gong of the Qingcheng Sword School is, I guess, somewhat better than ours of the Huashan Sword School,” Yue Buqun replied.

“The Qingcheng Sword School’s ‘bum bum back fleeing’ Kung Fu is definitely better than other schools.” Linghu Chong burst into laughter.

Yue Buqun pulled a long face and reproached, “Chong, you’ve really gotten a glib tongue with no decency. How would you be a role model for all your apprentice brothers and sisters if you keep acting like this?”

Linghu Chong turned his head aside, stuck his tongue out and made a face. “Yes, Master!” he answered

“If you agree, then agree. Why did you stick your tongue out when you answered? You are not being honest,” Yue Buqun criticized.

“Yes, Master!” Linghu Chong replied.

Yue Buqun had brought him up since he was little. To him, Yue Buqun was almost like a father figure. Although he revered the Master, he never reserved himself much in front of the Master.

“Master, how did you know that I stuck my tongue out?” he asked with a grin.

Yu Buqun snorted. “The muscles under your ear were retracting, so of course you were sticking your tongue out. You always like to run wild. See, you’ve come to a good grief this time! Are your wounds better now?”

“Yes, they are much better now,” Linghu Chong answered. He then added, “Well, the more grief this time, the smarter next time!”

Yue Buqun scolded, “Don’t you think you are too smart already?”

He took a signal flare out from his pocket and walked into the courtyard. Lighting the fuse with a match, he threw the flare up into the air. The flare rocketed high into the sky, and

with a loud “Bang,” it exploded in the air, leaving a trail of silver light in the shape of a long sword, hanging in the sky for a long while. Then the sword shaped light trail descended slowly for a couple hundred feet before finally bursting into hundreds of glitters. That was the type of signal flare used by the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School to call on all school members.

Soon footsteps from a distance rose as someone ran toward the tiny temple.

“Master, are you here?” Gao Gengming’s voice shouted from outside.

“Yes, I am in the temple,” Yue Buqun answered.

Gao Gengming came into the temple and bowed to Yue Buqun. “Master!” Seeing that Linghu Chong was standing next to the Master, he said cheerfully, “Big apprentice brother! Are you alright? We became really worried when we heard that you were severely wounded.”

“I guess I am plain lucky this time. I am still alive,” Linghu Chong said with a smile.

More sounds of footsteps came from the distance. It was Lao Denuo and Lu Dayou this time. As soon as Lu Dayou saw Linghu Chong, spending no time greeting the Master, he rushed straight forth toward Linghu Chong and gave a big hug to him while shouting happy words wildly. Then third apprentice Liang Fa and fourth apprentice Shi Daizi came into the temple one after another. After a few moments, seventh apprentice Tao Jun, eighth apprentice Ying Luobai, Yue Buqun’s daughter Yue Lingshan, and the new apprentice Lin Pingzhi came all at once.

Seeing his parents’ bodies, Lin Pingzhi threw himself onto them and began crying bitterly. All the fellow apprentices felt real sorry for him.

Yue Lingshan was gleefully surprised when she saw that Linghu Chong was all right. But seeing Lin Pingzhi’s bitter grief, she knew it wouldn’t be appropriate to express her



cheerfulness out loud at this moment, so she walked by Linghu Chong and slightly pinched his right hand.

"Are...are you all right?" she whispered.

"I am fine!" Linghu Chong answered.

For the last couple of days, Yue Lingshan had been worried to death about her big apprentice brother, and now when she finally bumped into him all of a sudden, she could no longer control the excitement that had been growing inside her these days. She grabbed onto Linghu Chong's sleeve and burst out crying.

Linghu Chong gently padded her on the shoulder. "Little apprentice sister, why? Did someone pick on you? I'll go whoop his ass for you!" he whispered.

Yue Lingshan did not answer and went on weeping. After shedding some more tears, she finally felt better. Wiping off the tears with Linghu Chong's sleeve, she murmured, "You are not dead. You are not dead!"

"I am not!" Linghu Chong shook his head.

"I heard that you took a palm strike from that Yu Canghai of the Qingcheng Sword School," Yue Lingshan whispered. "That man's 'Heart Crushing Palm' can kill without spilling blood. I've seen him kill many people with my own eyes. I was so scared that...that...." Remembering all the agonizing suffering and torturing she had to go through in the last couple of days, she could not help but start weeping again.

"I was really lucky that his palm strike missed me narrowly. It was such a cool scene earlier when the Master was fighting Yu Canghai and scared him so much that he ran away so fast. Too bad you missed that one," Linghu Chong said with a smile.

"Let's not mention this to any outsiders," Yue Buqun ordered. Linghu Chong and the rest of the apprentices all complied in unison.

Yue Lingshan stared at Linghu Chong through her tearful eyes. Linghu Chong looked so wan and sallow. There was little color in his cheeks. Feeling very pitiful for him, she

sniveled, "Big apprentice brother, this time...this time you are so badly wounded. You should have some good rest and recovery once we get back to Mount Huashan."

Seeing that Lin Pingzhi was still sobbing bitterly by his parents' bodies, Yue Buqun said, "Pingzhi, cry no more. We should make arrangements for the funeral now."

"Yes, Master!" Lin Pingzhi stood up and answered. But seeing blood all over his mother's face and forehead, he could not help but shed more tears. "When Mom and Dad passed away, they couldn't even see me one last time. They must...they must have wanted to give me some last words of advice," he murmured, sobbing.

"Apprentice brother Lin," Linghu Chong said, "I was here when your parents passed away. The two of them wanted me to take care of you. That's something I should be doing anyway, there's not much to talk about that. Your father had some other words that he wanted me to pass on to you."

"Big apprentice brother, at the time...when my mom and dad passed away, fortunately they had you as accompany. Otherwise, they would have had no one around them when they left this world. I...I am truly grateful!" Lin Pingzhi bowed.

"The rascals of the Qingcheng Sword School tortured your parents cruelly in order to force the whereabouts of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' out of them, but they never gave in. The torturing busted their heart arteries. Later that Mu Gaofeng also tried to force information out. Mu Gaofeng is a mean villain; doing what he did was not something out of his character. But Yu Canghai, as the Master of a big school, had acted in such a despicable way. Everybody will hold him in contempt for sure," Linghu Chong said.

"If I cannot seek my revenge, I will be no better than a pig!" Lin Pingzhi vowed with his teeth gnashed. He punched hard on the column. Although his Kung Fu skills were ordinary, yet because of the great hatred, the punch carried

much strength and even the dirt atop the cross beam in the temple started to fall down.

“Junior brother Lin,” Yue Lingshan said, “this matter really started because of me. When you settle your score later, as your senior apprentice sister, I definitely won’t just stand by with folded arms.”

“Many thanks, senior apprentice sister!” Lin Pingzhi bowed.

“The tenet of our Huashan Sword School has always been ‘if others don’t offend us, we won’t offend them’.” Yue Buqun sighed. “Other than our deadly enemy the Demon Cult, there’s no grudge between any of the schools or clans in the Martial World and us. But starting from now on, the Qingcheng Sword School...the Qingcheng Sword School... Well, as a part of the Martial World, not offending anyone is so much easier said than done.”

“Little apprentice sister and junior brother Lin,” Lau Denuo said, “this misfortune wasn’t really caused by junior brother Lin, because he killed the wicked son of Yu Canghai to defend justice. It was really because Yu Canghai coveted the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript’ of the Lin family. Many years ago, when the Head Master of Qingcheng, Evergreen, lost to junior brother Lin’s great grandfather’s ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art,’ the root of the trouble was already planted.”

“That’s right,” Yue Buqun said. “Most martial people tend to scramble for supremacy and victory. So as soon as they hear about some kind of secret manuscripts of Kung Fu, not even bothering to check if it’s real or not, they would all try to secure it by force or by trickery, by hook or by crook. People like Master Yu or Hunchback of the North, who already have elite skills and fames, really have no need to covet the sword art manuscript of your Lin family.”

“Master, my family really do not have any kind of Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,” Lin Pingzhi said. “My dad taught me the seventy-two moves of the Evil-Resisting Sword Art personally and orally. He told me to memorize everything

in my head. If there was some kind of sword art manuscript, of course my dad wouldn't tell outsiders anything about it, but why would he keep it a secret from me? There's no reason for that."

Yue Buqun nodded in agreement. "I never believed that there was some kind of Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript. Otherwise, Yu Canghai would be no match for your father. It's just so clear and simple."

"Junior brother Lin, your father wanted me to tell you: In the Xiang-Yang Alley of Fuzhou...", Linghu Chong said.

Yue Buqun waved him off. "These are the last words of Pingzhi's father. You can tell Pingzhi alone. There's no need for others to hear about it."

"Yes, Master!" Linghu Chong answered.

"Denuo, Gengming, you two go buy two coffins in the town of Hengshan." Yue Buqun instructed.

After putting the Lin couple into the coffins, they hired some porters to carry the coffins to the river wharf. The group hired a big ship and headed north by water.

When they arrived at west Henan Province, they changed into traveling by land. Linghu Chong rested in a wagon through the trip, while his wounds slowly recovered. Days later, they arrived afoot the Jade Maiden Peak of Mount Huashan. The Lin couple's coffins were temporarily placed in a small temple by the side of the peak, so an appropriate date for burial can be decided on later. Gao Gengming and Lu Dayou went up the peak ahead of everyone else to inform about the return of the group. Soon the rest of the Huashan apprentices that stayed on Mount Huashan, about twenty of them or so, came down to greet the Master. Lao Denuo introduced them to Lin Pingzhi one by one. Some elder ones were well over thirty years of age; some younger ones were only about fifteen or sixteen. Among them were six female apprentices. As soon as they spotted Yue Lingshan, they immediately went into chitchats. The rule of the Huashan Sword School's apprenticeship was that seniority would be

based on the date order when each one became an apprentice, so with even the youngest one Shu Qi, Lin Pingzhi had to call him senior apprentice brother. Yue Lingshan was the only exception. She was the daughter of Yue Buqun, so she couldn't be ranked using the same ordering system, and had to be called based on age. People older than her called her junior sister. She was really a couple of years younger than Lin Pingzhi, but she firmly insisted on being Lin Pingzhi's senior apprentice sister. Since Yue Buqun did not object, so Lin Pingzhi called her "senior apprentice sister."

After they all climbed up the peak, Lin Pingzhi followed behind all the senior apprentice brothers. The mountain was very precipitous, yet appeared to be graceful and elegant because of the many ancient trees. Bird tweeting and stream gurgling echoed, making the place a lively environment. Several big houses stood on the side of the hill, some tall, some short, built following the slope of the hill, and all with whitewashed walls.

A middle-aged, pretty lady slowly walked toward them, and as soon as Yue Lingshan caught the sight of her, she dashed into her arms and shouted excitedly.

"Mom, I've got a new junior apprentice brother!" She pointed at Lin Pingzhi, smiling.

Lin Pingzhi had heard from his senior apprentice brothers that Madam Yue, Ning Zhongze, or Master-Wife, as how all the apprentices called her, was really a junior apprentice sister of the Master under the same master, and her sword skills were really no less than the Master. So he rushed forward and kowtowed.

"Lin Pingzhi here shows his respect to Master-Wife."

"That's wonderful! Get up, get up!" Madam Yue said with a bright smile. She turned to Yue Buqun with a grin. "Every time when you go down the mountain, you always seek a couple treasures to satisfy your craving. This time when you headed for the Hengshan Meeting, I figured that you'd be

getting at least three or four new apprentices. How come you only came back with one?"

"Didn't you always say quality is more important than quantity? What do you think about this one?" Yue Buqun grinned.

"This one is way too handsome. He doesn't look like the kind of material for Kung Fu training. Why don't you have him study the Four Books and the Five Classics<sup>48</sup> from you, so he will pass the Xiucai<sup>49</sup> test someday, and maybe become a Zhuangyuan<sup>50</sup> later?" Madam Yue said with a big smile.

Lin Pingzhi blushed. "Master-Wife is not taking me seriously because I look gentle and frail. I'll have to work extra hard, so I won't be looked down upon because my performance is inferior to the other senior apprentice brothers," he told himself.

"That's a wonderful idea. If the Huashan Sword School could actually produce a Zhuangyuan, then we would be creating legends for our descendents," Yue Buqun answered with a grin.

Madam Yue glared at Linghu Chong. "You got into fights with others and got wounded again, didn't you? How come you don't look too well right now? Were you severely wounded?" she asked.

"It's already much better now. If I hadn't been lucky this time, I probably wouldn't even make it back to see you again," Linghu Chong replied with a light smile.

Madam Yue gave him another glare. "It's a good lesson for you to learn that there's always stronger than the strong. Did you think you lost in a fair fight?"

"I couldn't fend off the fellow Tian Boguang's fast knife chops. Master-Wife, will you please give me some pointers?" Linghu Chong requested.

Hearing that it was Tian Boguang who had injured Linghu Chong, Madam Yue nodded, while a big smile blossomed on her face. "So you were fighting the villain Tian Boguang. That's great! I thought you stirred up dispute and got into

trouble again. How were his fast knife chops? Let's think it over and refine your techniques, so you can fight him again."

During the trip back home, Linghu Chong had asked several times for advice from his Master about techniques to counter Tian Boguang's fast knife chops, but Yue Buqun had not said any word in regard, and simply told him to ask his Master-Wife once they were back to Mount Huashan. Sure enough, as soon as Madam Yue heard about it, she got so excited that she almost wished she could get onto it the very moment.

The bunch went into the house Yue Buqun lived in - "House of Integrity," and talked about events that had happened since the two groups separated. The six female apprentices really envied Yue Lingshan when they heard about her adventure in the town of Fuzhou and in the town of Hengshan. Lu Dayou, on the other hand, really bragged about how the big apprentice brother had fought the fierce fights with Tian Boguang and how he had slain Luo Renjie, to the bunch of junior apprentice brothers. He added many inflammatory details to the story, and it sounded as if big apprentice brother had defeated Tian Boguang instead of suffering a crushing defeat. After they had some snacks and tea, Madam Yue asked Linghu Chong to emulate Tian Boguang's knife moves and also inquired about how he had countered them.

"That chap Tian Boguang's knife skills are excellent. I was simply dazzled just looking at the chops, having a hard time fending them off. How could I have countered them?" Linghu Chong answered with a grin.

"If you couldn't fend them off, then you must have used all kinds of tricks in a slick way to cheat your way through," Madam Yue concluded. She had raised Linghu Chong up, so of course, she had a very good idea of Linghu Chong's character.

Linghu Chong blushed. "When I fought Tian Boguang outside the cave, the apprentice sister of the Heng-Shan

Sword School had left, and I no longer had any scruple, so I fought the chap Tian Boguang with all my heart. But not far into the fight, he started using his fast knife chop moves. After fending off only two of those moves, I was already groaning inwardly: 'Looks like I am dead meat!' So I started laughing loudly.

"Tian Boguang pulled his knife back. 'What's so funny?' he asked. 'Do you think you can fend off my thirteen stances of 'Wind Storm' knife chops?'

"I said, 'Aha, so the well-known Tian Boguang is actually an expelled apprentice of our Huashan Sword School. I had no idea! Really no idea! I got it. You must have been kicked out of our school because of your dreadful personal character.'

"Tian Boguang said, 'Expelled Huashan apprentice? What kind of nonsense is that? My Kung Fu is of its own style. What the hell has it got anything to do with your Huashan Sword School?'

"I said, 'This set of knife moves has a total of thirteen stances, right? 'Wind Storm?' Did you just pick a nice random name for it? I've seen my Master and Master-Wife use those during practices before. My Master-Wife created those out of a sudden inspiration when she was embroidering. You must know that we've gotten a Jade Maiden Peak in Mount Huashan, don't you?'

"Tian Boguang answered, 'Yeah. Everybody knows there's a Jade Maiden Peak in Mount Huashan. What about it?'

"I answered, 'This set of sword art created by my Master-Wife is called 'The Thirteen Stances of Jade Maiden's Golden Needle.' One of them is called 'Threading the Needle;' another one is called 'Seamless Heavenly Robe;' there's also another one called 'Late Night Embroidering of the Loving Birds.'

"Then I started counting with my fingers as I spoke. I said, 'That's right, the two moves you just used were evolved from the eighth move created by my Master-Wife: 'Weaving



Goddess Throwing the Shuttles.’ Why would a valiantly and hefty fellow like you imitate the manners of my affectedly sweet Master-Wife and throw the shuttle with the pretty hands from left to right, then right to left, like how the gorgeous looking Weaving Goddess would have when she is sitting by a weaving loom. Don’t you think that’s just hilarious...?’” Before he even finished, Yue Lingshan and the bunch of female apprentices all started giggling.

“That’s too mischievous!” Yue Buqun scolded, yet could not help but grin.

“Bah,” Madam Yue spat at Linghu Chong. “Why couldn’t you use some other materials for your nonsense, and had to get your Master-Wife involved? You really deserve a good beating.”

“Master-Wife, you don’t understand.” Linghu Chong grinned. “That Tian Boguang is rather conceited. When he heard that I was comparing him to a woman and that my Master-Wife created her own magical knife moves, he had to argue about it and definitely wouldn’t just kill me right away. Sure enough, he started to show me the moves of that set of knife chops one by one slowly. Each time when he was demonstrating one, he would ask, ‘Did your Master-Wife create this one?’

“I pretended to be very secretive about it and kept my silence while secretly memorizing his knife moves. I waited till he was done demonstrating all thirteen stances and then said, ‘This set of knife art of yours only has very slight deviations from the one created by my Master-Wife, but the majority of it is still the same. This is really odd? How did you steal it from our Huashan Sword School?’

“Tian Boguang said angrily, ‘You couldn’t fend off this set of knife art of mine. That’s why you simply made things up to stall time so you can investigate the moves of my knife art. Did you think I am stupid? You said your school has the same set of knife art, then please show them to me and help me broaden my horizon.’

“I said, ‘First of all, our school uses swords, not knives. Secondly, this set of ‘Jade Maiden’s Golden Needle Sword’ of my Master-Wife is only taught to female apprentices, not male apprentices. If we hefty guys had to use such sissy looking sword art, wouldn’t we become the laughing stocks of the entire Martial World?’

“Tian Boguang became even more angry. He yelled, ‘Whether I become the laughing stock or not, I am going to make you admit that the Huashan Sword School does not have this set of Kung Fu. Brother, I admire your courage, but you shouldn’t wag your tongue so freely and make fun of me.’”

“Who cares if such a shameless villain admires you or not? He deserves to be made fun of,” Yue Lingshan interrupted.

“But in that circumstance,” Linghu Chong said, “if I did not demonstrate this made-up set of ‘Jade Maiden’s Golden Needle Sword’ in front of him, I’d be dead by now. So with no other choices, I had to add some affectedly bashful moves at random based on his knife art and demonstrated the moves.”

“Did these affectedly bashful moves of yours look real?” Yue Lingshan giggled.

“I’ve seen you use your sword many times, so how could they not look real?” Linghu Chong grinned.

“Ah, you are making fun of me saying that I use my sword in an affectedly bashful way. I am not going to talk to you for three days!”

Madam Yue had been quiet for the time being, and finally she spoke out.

“Lingshan, give your sword to big apprentice brother.”

Yue Lingshan drew her long sword and handed it to Linghu Chong with the handle first.

“Mom wants to see the wicked look of yours with those affectedly bashful moves,” she said with a grin.

“Chong, don’t pay attention to Lingshan. How did you demonstrate the moves at that time?” Madam Yue asked.

Linghu Chong knew that Master-Wife meant to see Tian Boguang's knife moves. He took the long sword and then bowed to the Master and Master-Wife.

"Master! Master-Wife! May I demonstrate Tian Boguang's knife moves now?"

Yue Buqun nodded.

"Junior brother Lin," Lu Dayou said to Lin Pingzhi, "this is a rule of our school. Every time before an apprentice performs moves in front of elders, he must first ask for permission."

"I see. Thanks for telling me, sixth apprentice brother," Lin Pingzhi said.

Linghu Chong yawned languidly with a slight smile on his face and then held up his arms sluggishly as if he was going to stretch himself, but suddenly, he snapped his right wrist speedily and chopped three chops continuously. The chops were almost as fast as flashes, and whistles from the sword slashes echoed. All the apprentices were shocked, and a few of the female apprentices uttered a cry of surprise almost in unison. Linghu Chong started to chop, slice, slash and stab the long sword in all directions. The moves appeared as if they were going in all directions randomly and disorderly, but in Yue Buqun and Madam Yue's eyes, the dozens of moves were clear and distinct; every hack, thrust, slash or chop was vicious yet accurate. Only moments later, Linghu Chong had pulled the sword back and stood still to bow to the Master and Master-Wife.

Yue Lingshan was a bit disappointed. "That fast?" she said.

"It has to be that fast." Madam Yue nodded. "Within those thirteen stances of fast knife chops, each stance has three or four moves of variation. Over forty moves had passed within such a short period of time. This is really an exceptional set of fast knife art."

"When the chap Tian Boguang used it, he was way faster than what I've just demonstrated," Linghu Chong added.

Madam Yue and Yu Buqun looked at each other, both couldn't help but feeling some admiration and surprise inwardly.

"Big apprentice brother, how come you didn't look anything close to affectedly bashful?" Yue Lingshan asked mockingly.

"For the last several weeks, I've been thinking about this set of fast knife chops all the time, so of course when I showed them I was able to do it a little bit faster. That day when I was showing them to Tian Boguang in the remote mountain area, I wasn't doing it as fast. I had to intentionally make those moves similar to his moves yet different, as well as putting on an act with many postures of a lady, therefore it was even slower," Linghu Chong explained with a smile.

"How did you put on the postures of a lady? Show me! Show me!" Yue Lingshan requested, her face split into a big grin.

Madam Yue turned to her side and drew a long sword from one of her female apprentices. "Use the fast knife chops!" She demanded.

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered, and with a loud "Swoosh," his long sword circled around Madam Yue's body and the blade chopped toward her lower back.

"Mom, look out!" Yue Lingshan cried out in shock.

Madam Yue threw herself forward, completely ignoring Linghu Chong's chop from her back, and her sword tip went straight toward Linghu Chong's chest, also extremely fast and swift.

"Big apprentice brother, watch out!" Yue Lingshan uttered another cry.

Linghu Chong didn't block either. "Master-Wife, he was way faster," he said as he chopped backward with his sword.

Madam Yue attacked with another three thrusts, and Linghu Chong also returned the attacks with three chops. The two both fought with fast attacking moves, and none

used any defending moves to block. Within a short moment, the two had exchanged over twenty moves.

Lin Pingzhi was dumbstruck. "Big apprentice brother speaks and acts like a lunatic, but his Kung Fu skills are excellent. I'll have to train really hard, with no slack anytime whatsoever, so others won't belittle me," he told himself.

Right at the moment, with a quick thrust, Madam Yue's sword tip had touched Linghu Chong's throat. Not able to dodge that, Linghu Chong muttered, "He can block that."

"Fine!" Madam Yue shouted. She waved her sword and a couple of moves later, her sword tip stopped next to Linghu Chong's heart.

"He can block that," Linghu Chong muttered the second time.

What he meant was that even though he wasn't able to block it, Tian Boguang would have been able to block those two moves because his knife chops were a lot faster.

The two fought faster and faster, and soon, Linghu Chong didn't even have any time to spill the words 'he can block that.' Whenever Madam Yue's sword tip pointed next to his vital body parts, he simply shook his head to signal that the move would not have worked on Tian Boguang.

Madam Yue was really in the mood now; she was totally carried away. Suddenly with a loud and clear roar, she thrust the sword rapidly around Linghu Chong's body, the sword tip flashed about as if it was everywhere; the silver reflection circled around and blurred the audiences' eyes. Suddenly she pushed the sword straight toward Linghu Chong's heart in the speed of light, with the strength of a thunder.

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. "Master-Wife!" he cried.

By then the sword tip had already penetrated his robe. Madam Yue's right hand still pushed forward until the hand guard of the long sword touched Linghu Chong's chest. It seemed as though the sword had went through Linghu Chong's body all the way till the end of the sword.

“Mom!” Yue Lingshan screamed. Then sounds of clatter and jingle echoed when pieces of inch-long steel fell down to the floor by Linghu Chong’s feet. Madam Yue smiled as she pulled her hand back. In her hand, all there was left of the long sword was only the sword handle.

“Junior apprentice sister, your inner energy has really progressed, and you kept it well from me,” Yue Buqun said happily.

The two of them had studied under the same Master. They were used to the way they had called each other in their youth, so after they got married, they still called each other apprentice sister and brother.

“Senior apprentice brother is really flattering me. These were just insignificant skills. Nothing to be mentioned about!” Madam Yue said with a smile.

Staring at the pieces of broken sword, Linghu Chong gasped with astonishment. Master-Wife must have thrust the sword out with her whole might, otherwise, without the full strength of her inner energy, the sword thrust would not have had such extraordinary speed. As soon as the sword tip reached the skin, she immediately retracted the vigorous inner energy and changed the direction of the strength from horizontal to vertical, and the great shock from the inner energy strength broke the long sword into inch-long pieces. The superb inner energy manipulation had really reached the level of perfection. In great admiration, he said, “Even if Tian Boguang’s knife chops were faster, he still would not have escaped this thrust of yours, Master-Wife.”

Lin Pingzhi stared at the many holes all over Linghu Chong’s robe, which all came from Madam Yue’s sword thrusts, and almost couldn’t believe his own eyes. “There are actually sword arts this fantastic in the world. All I need is a portion of that and I’d have enough skills to avenge my parents.” He then thought, “The Qingcheng Sword School and Mu Gaofeng both coveted our family’s ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,’ but when comparing our family’s Evil-

Resisting Sword Art to the sword art of Master-Wife, they are as far apart as from heaven to earth!”

Madam Yue was quite contended. “Chong, since you say this move can kill Tian Boguang, if you train hard, I’ll teach it to you,” she said.

“Thanks to Master-Wife!” Linghu Chong replied.

“Mom, I want to learn it too,” Yue Lingshan demanded.

“Your inner energy is not there yet. You won’t be able to learn this move.” Madam Yue shook her head.

Very discontented, Yue Lingshan pouted her lips. “Big apprentice brother’s inner energy is not that much better than mine. Why can he learn it, but not me?” she complained.

Madam Yue did not answer and only smiled.

Yue Lingshan grabbed onto her father’s sleeve and begged, “Father, you teach me a Kung Fu that will counter that sword move, in case big apprentice brother picks on me after he learns that sword move.”

“This sword move of your mom’s is called ‘Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning.’ Since it’s unrivaled, how could I have anything to counter it?” Yue Buqun shook his head and grinned.

“That’s nonsense. It’s alright that you flatter me, but once the name spreads out, fellow martial people will laugh their teeth off for sure.” Madam Yue smiled.

This sword move was really created out of a sudden inspiration of Madam Yue. It contained the Huashan inner energy style, the Huashan sword techniques, plus some of her clever inventions, so it was indeed a devastating move. But since it had just been created, there was no name for it. Yue Buqun had thought of naming it “The Unrivaled Thrust of Madam Yue,” but then he thought that his wife had always been valuing her own pride; even after they got married, she still liked when fellow martial people called her “Heroine Ning” instead of “Madam Yue.” Calling her “Heroine Ning” would be praising her own skills and behavior, and calling

her “Madam Yue” would only make it sound like she was relying on her world-renowned husband.

Although Madam Yue called her husband’s words nonsense, she truly liked the name “Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning,” and praised inwardly that her husband, as a scholar, had really thought of a wonderful name for her new move.

“Father, when are you going to create the ‘Incomparable and Unparalleled, The Ten Thrusts of Yue,’ and then teach them to your daughter, so I can challenge big apprentice brother?” Yue Lingshan asked.

“No, I cannot. Dad is not as smart as your mom. I don’t know how to create new moves!” Yue Buqun shook his head.

“It’s not that you don’t know. It’s just that you are afraid of your wife, and dared not to create any,” Yue Lingshan whispered at her father’s ear.

Yue Buqun burst into loud laughter. “Total nonsense,” he denied as he gave a gentle pinch to Yue Lingshan’s cheek.

“Lingshan, don’t get wild with your father. Denuo, go arrange the ritual so your apprentice brother Lin can pay his respects to the spirits of all the former grandmasters of our sword school,” Madam Yue instructed.

“Yes!” Lau Denuo answered and soon had everything ready.

Yue Buqun led the group into the Back Hall. Lin Pingzhi could see a banner board hanging high in the middle of the room, and the words “Inner Energy Drives the Sword” were inscribed onto the board. The hall was decorated in a very serious and solemn manner. Swords after swords hung by the two sidewalls. The sheaths were pitch black and the tassels all appeared to be ancient. Lin Pingzhi figured that those swords must have been the swords of all those former grandmasters of the Huashan Sword School. He thought to himself, “Huashan Sword School has such a great fame and reputation in the Martial World today. There must be heaps of evil villains who died from these grandmasters’ long swords.”



Yue Buqun knelt in front of the incense burner table and kowtowed four times.

“Apprentice Yue Buqun is taking Lin Pingzhi of Fuzhou as my apprentice today. All the ancestors’ spirits in Heaven, will you please bless Lin Pingzhi and watch out for him, have him study and train hard, preserve his purity, follow the school rules, and never harm the reputation of the Huashan Sword School?” he prayed.

Hearing these words from Yue Buqun, Lin Pingzhi knelt down behind him respectfully.

Yue Buqun stood up. “Lin Pingzhi,” he said coldly, “you are taken into our Huashan Sword School today. You must follow the school rules strictly. If you ever violate any of them, you will be punished based on the severity. If the violation were severe, you would be beheaded with no pardon. Our sword school has been in the Martial World for hundreds of years. Although we are capable of striving for supremacy with other schools using our Kung Fu skills, temporary victories are really not worth mentioning. The real important thing is that members of our school all greatly value the reputation of our school. You must remember that well.”

“Yes, Master. I will always keep your advice and instruction in my heart,” Lin Pingzhi promised.

“Linghu Chong, recite the school rules to Lin Pingzhi,” Yue Buqun ordered.

“Yes, Master!” Linghu Chong answered. “Apprentice brother Lin, listen carefully. Firstly, any deceiving behavior to the Master and any disrespectful behavior to the seniors is prohibited; secondly, bullying the weak and hurting the innocent is prohibited; thirdly, assailing of women with obscenities is prohibited; fourthly, jealousy and killing between school members are prohibited; fifthly, stealing and forsaking righteousness for the lust of gain is prohibited; sixthly, conceited and arrogant attitudes when dealing with fellow martial people are prohibited; seventhly, reckless

collaboration with gangsters or evil and wicked is prohibited. These are the seven prohibitions of Huashan. All members of the Huashan Sword School have to follow them.”

“Yes. I promise to remember the seven Huashan prohibitions that big apprentice brother just informed me. I will follow all the rules and never dare to violate any of them,” Lin Pingzhi promised sincerely.

“Well, that’s it.” Yue Buqun smiled. “Our school is not like most other schools that have many rules and regulations. As long as you remember these seven prohibitions well and always remember to uphold humanity and righteousness above everything else, behaving like a true gentleman, you’ll keep the Master and the Master-Wife happy.”

“Yes, Master!” Lin Pingzhi answered. He kowtowed to the Master and the Master-Wife, then bowed to and saluted all apprentice brothers and sisters.

“Pingzhi, let’s first bury your parents to let you fulfill your duty as the son, then I will start teaching you the basic drills of our sword school,” Yue Buqun said.

Tears instantly filled Lin Pingzhi’s eyes. “Many thanks to Master and Master-Wife,” He said, kneeling down on the floor.

Yu Buqun propped him up. “In our school,” he said kindly, “everybody is like a member of a big family. When one has a matter to deal with, it becomes a matter for the entire group. You don’t have to be so courteous.”

Yue Buqun turned around and looked at Linghu Chong up and down. After quite a while he finally said, “Chong, this time after you left Mount Huashan, how many prohibitions have you violated?”

Linghu Chong’s heart skipped a beat. He knew that in normal days the Master was always kind and loving to all the apprentices, but if anyone violated school rules, he would be punishing the violator severely without any mercy. So he knelt down in front of the incense burner table.

“I have realized my mistake,” he said. “I did not listen to the advice from Master and Master-Wife. I violated the sixth

prohibition of being conceited and arrogant when dealing with fellow martial people. I killed Luo Renjie of the Qingcheng Sword School on top of the Huiyan Wine House in the town of Hengshan.”

Yue Buqun let out a snort with a stern face.

“Father, it was Luo Renjie who had bullied big apprentice brother. At that time big apprentice brother just had a fierce fight with Tian Boguang and was severely injured. Luo Renjie took advantage of big apprentice brother. How could big apprentice brother just let himself get killed like that?” Yue Lingshan argued.

“This matter does not concern you. This really started because Chong kicked the two Qingcheng apprentices earlier. If it weren’t because of the grudge before, why would that Luo Renjie take advantage of Chong when everything is perfectly alright?” Yue Buqun reproved.

“When big apprentice kicked the Qingcheng apprentices, you had already given him thirty sticks of beating as punishment. That matter was over; you cannot count that one in again. Big apprentice brother is so badly injured, he can’t take any more beating now.” Yue Lingshan pleaded.

Yue Buqun gave a strict glare at his daughter. “We are talking about school prohibitions right now. You are an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School. Shut up and don’t interrupt me,” he yelled sharply.

Yue Lingshan rarely received any harsh words or stern looks from her father; feeling the grievance, her eyes reddened and she almost fell into a cry.

During normal days, even if Yue Buqun ignored his daughter, Madam Yue would have comforted her with kind words, but since Yue Buqun was judging school matters as the Head Master at the moment, it wouldn’t be appropriate for Madam Yue to help her daughter, so she had to pretend that she didn’t see or hear anything.

Yue Buqun continued with Linghu Chong, “When Luo Renjie took advantage of you and humiliated you, you would

rather die than submit. That was something a true man would have done. But why did you offend the Heng-Shan Sword School in your words and said something like 'Once seeing a nun, one loses all bets,' and that even I was afraid of seeing nuns?"

Yue Lingshan burst into laughter. "Father!" she yelled.

Yue Buqun waved her off, but had dropped his stern look.

Linghu Chong explained, "I only wanted to get the apprentice sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School to leave at that time. I knew I was no match for Tian Boguang in a fight, and would have no way to rescue the apprentice sister of the Heng-Shan Sword School, but she valued the brotherhood of fellow martial people and didn't want to leave first, so I had to make up some nonsense. That kind of nonsense is truly disrespectful to the Uncle-Masters of the Heng-Shan Sword School."

"You wanted to get nephew apprentice Yilin to leave; the intention was good, but why can't you say something else instead of such harmful words? It was all because you are used to being frivolous in normal days. By now, everybody in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance has heard about this incident. Others must be saying behind our backs that you are not a true gentleman, and blame me for not disciplining you properly," Yue Buqun reproached.

"Yes, Master. I was wrong," Linghu Chong admitted.

Yue Buqun continued. "When you were recovering in the 'Jade House,' we understand that you had no other options. But when you hid nephew apprentice Yilin and that little demon girl of the Demon Cult under the quilt, and claimed that it was a prostitute in the town of Hengshan, weren't you risking too much? If they had actually found out about the truth, losing face and hurting the reputation of our Huashan Sword School would be secondary; wouldn't you do a disservice to the entire Heng-Shan Sword School by ruining their hundreds of years of reputation?"

Cold sweat broke out on Linghu Chong's back. "Later when I thought more about it, I was also breathless with anxiety. So Master, you have already known about it," he said with a trembling voice.

"I only heard about how Qu Yang of Demon Cult sent you to the 'Jade House' to recover later," Yue Buqun said, "but when you told those two girls to hide under the quilt, I was already outside of the window."

"Fortunately, Master, you know that I am not a reckless loafer," Linghu Chong said.

"If you had actually been sleeping with the prostitutes, I'd have chopped off the head on your neck a long time ago. How could I still let you live 'til now?" Yue Buqun said in a chilling tone.

"Yes, Master!" Linghu Chong answered.

Yue Buqun's face turned more and more serious. After quite a while he spoke again. "You already knew that the Qu-named girl was a member of the Demon Cult, why didn't you kill her with a single sword blow? Although her grandfather had saved your life, it was obviously an evil plot the Demon Cult had put together using favor as bait to foment discord among our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. You are not stupid. You had to have figured that part out. There was actually a bigger conspiracy, and saving your life was only a small part of it. Even Liu Zhengfeng, such a smart and experienced senior master, fell into their trap, and ended up ruining his reputation and getting his entire family killed. You have seen such vicious and evil acts of the Demon Cult with your own eyes. But on our way from Hunan back to Mount Huashan, I didn't hear a single word of condemnation to the Demon Cult out from your mouth. Chong, I think after he saved your life, you are getting really confused about the distinction between good and evil, honesty and treachery. This matter is the key matter that will affect the rest of your entire life. There's no middle ground for you to muddle with."

Linghu Chong couldn't help but remember the night in the remote valley when he listened to the zither and flute music played by Qu Yang and Liu Zhengfeng. It didn't seem like that Qu Yang had any evil thoughts and intentionally harmed Liu Zhengfeng at all.

Seeing the hesitation on Linghu Chong's face, obviously suspicious about his words, Yue Buqun said, "Chong, this matter is related to the future of our Huashan Sword School. It is also related to your future success or failure of your entire life. You cannot hide anything from me. Let me ask you: when you meet a member of the Demon Cult later, are you going to be treating evil as your enemy and slay evil with no hesitation?"

Linghu Chong stared at his Master blankly; a thought kept flashing around in his mind: "Later when I meet with a member of the Demon Cult, should I simply draw my sword and kill him without checking if it's right or wrong?" He really couldn't decide for himself, so he didn't know how to answer the Master's question.

Yue Buqun stared at Linghu Chong for a long while but still did not get an answer out from him. He heaved a deep sigh.

"It would be useless to force an answer out of you. When you left Mount Huashan this time, you greatly damaged the reputation of our sword school. I hereby punish you to meditate facing the wall for an entire year, so you can think the matter through thoroughly."

"Yes, Master! I accept my punishment." Linghu Chong bowed down.

"Meditating facing a wall for an entire year? Then throughout the year, how many total hours does he have to meditate?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"What total hours? Everyday from morning to night, other than eating and sleeping, he will be meditating to go over his mistakes."

“That’s terrible! Wouldn’t he be bored to death? Will he even be allowed to go to bathroom?” Yue Lingshan said in worry.

“Watch your manners, young lady!” Madam Yue reproved.

“What’s the big deal about meditating for a year?” Yue Buqun said. “Years ago when your grandmaster made some mistakes, he was punished to meditate facing a wall for three years and six months. During that entire period of time, he did not take one single step down the Jade Maiden Peak.”

Yue Lingshan stuck her tongue out in disbelief. “So meditating for an entire year is actually a light punishment? Big apprentice brother said the ‘Once seeing a nun, one loses all bets’ completely out of good intentions. He wasn’t really saying bad words!”

“Just because he had good intentions, I am only punishing him with one year of meditation. If he had any ill intentions, I’d have knocked off all his teeth and cut off his tongue,” Yue Buqun said.

“Lingshan, stop bothering your father,” Madam Yue said. “When your big apprentice brother starts meditating on top of the Jade Maiden Peak, you’d better not go up there to chat with him, otherwise, the good intention of your father would be ruined by you for sure.”

“Big apprentice brother is going to be a prisoner on top of the Jade Maiden Peak, and you still call that a good intention? If you don’t allow me to chat with him, then when big apprentice brother gets lonely, who’s going to cheer him up? And within the entire year, who’s going to practice sword arts with me?” Yue Lingshan whined.

“If you go chatting with him, then how will he be able to meditate and how can he think his mistakes through? All the many apprentice brothers and sisters can practice sword arts with you,” Madam Yue said.

Yue Lingshan leaned her head to the side and thought for a while. “Then what’s big apprentice brother going to eat? If

he doesn't come down the peak for an entire year, isn't he going to be starved to death?" she asked.

"You don't have to worry. We will have people bringing food up the mountain for him," Madam Yue answered.



# **Chapter 8: Meditation**

## **Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Out of desperation, Linghu Chong grabbed at her left sleeve. “Let it go!” yelled Yue Lingshan angrily. She pulled hard, and with a loud tearing sound, the whole sleeve was torn off and her entire arm was exposed.**

At dusk that night, after bowing to Master and Master-Wife and bidding his farewell to all the apprentice brothers and sisters, Linghu Chong climbed up the steep cliff on the very top of the Jade Maiden Peak, bringing only a long sword with him. There was a cave on top of the cliff. It was the spot used for punishing generations of Huashan Sword School apprentices who had violated school rules. The cliff was completely bare, with neither a single blade of grass, nor any trees. Other than the cave, there was nothing else on the cliff. Mount Huashan has many beautiful locations of scenery and resourceful of trees and grasses, but this steep cliff was an exception. Legend told that the cliff was a pearl studded on the Jade Maiden’s hairpin. The reason why earlier generations of Huashan grandmasters picked this steep cliff as the place for punishing apprentices was mainly because it was such a bare place that even birds or insects didn’t want to live here. Therefore, when the punished apprentice meditated and thought through his mistakes, he wouldn’t be distracted by other things and would be able to stay focused.

Linghu Chong entered the cave, and a big smooth rock on the floor soon caught his eyes.

“For the last several hundred years, many grandmasters of our Huashan Sword School must have sat on this rock before, which really smoothed out the rock surface. I, Linghu Chong, am the number one troublemaker of Huashan Sword School nowadays, so of course I am destined to sit on this rock. Master has been really kind to me. He had waited until today to send me here to sit on this rock,” Linghu Chong thought to himself.

“Hello rock!” He patted on the big rock gently and muttered. “You’ve probably been lonely for many years. But Linghu Chong is here to be your company now.”

Sitting down on the rock, he found his eyes only one foot away from the rock wall. Then something caught his attention. The words “Feng Qingyang” were carved on the left side of the rock wall. Those must have been carved using a sharp blade – the vigorous strokes were almost half-an-inch deep into the rock.

“Who’s this Feng Qingyang?” Linghu Chong couldn’t help but ask himself. “He is probably a senior master of our school who was once punished to meditate here. Oh, I see. My Grandmaster’s name has a ‘Qing’ in it and he belongs to the ‘Qing’ generation of Huashan masters. This senior master named Feng must be my Grand Uncle-Master then. It takes great strength to carve something like that. His Kung Fu must have been outstanding. How come Master and Master-Wife never mentioned him before? I guess this senior master must have passed away a long time ago.”

He closed his eyes and worked on his breathing exercises for about an hour before standing up again to stretch out. Going back into the cave and sat back down on the rock, he started pondering upon the question, “When I meet people from the Demon Cult, should I simply draw my sword and kill him right away with no questions asked and with no regards? Doesn’t the Demon Cult even have a single good person? But if he were a good person, why would he join the Demon Cult in the first place? Even if he had joined the Demon Cult by mistake, he could have quit immediately. If he didn’t quit, then he must be willing to collaborate with evil and harm innocent people.”

Instantly, many scenes appeared in his mind. Those were all scenes Master, Master-Wife, and other senior masters in the Martial World had told him before, things about the many kinds of murders the Demon Cult members had committed: The entire family of Master Yu in Jiangxi Province, a total of twenty-three, were taken prisoner by the Demon Cult and all were nailed onto tree trunks. Even the three-year-old child was no exception. Two of Master Yu’s sons groaned for three

days and three nights before finally passing away. When the Head Master of Dragon-Phoenix Saber in Jinan, Zhao Dengkui, held the wedding ceremony for his son, members of the Demon Cult forced their way into the crowds, beheaded the newly weds and placed their heads on top of the gift table claiming them to be wedding gifts. When old Hero Hao in Hanyang had his seventieth birthday party and invited many friends in the Martial World over, no one had known that the Demon Cult had planted bombs right underneath the room for the ceremony. The sudden explosion killed and wounded countless number of people, including Uncle-Master Ji from the Taishan Sword School, who lost an arm in this tragedy. Uncle-Master Ji had told this story himself, so it had to be true. Then he remembered when he met Uncle-Master Sun of the Songshan Sword School, whose both arms, feet and eyes were cut out. He was screaming nonstop, "The Demon Cult did this. Seek revenge for me! The Demon Cult did this. Seek revenge for me!" At that time the Songshan Sword School had already sent people to help, but with such severe wounds, there was really not much to be done. Remembering the image of two empty holes on Uncle-Master Sun's face with blood gushing out continuously, Linghu Chong could not help but quiver.

"Demon Cult members really have committed too many cruel crimes," he thought. "So when Qu Yang and his granddaughter saved me, they must have had ill intentions. When Master asks me again if I will kill with no hesitation when I see members of the Demon Cult, my answer will be: Why should I hesitate? Of course I will draw my sword and attack with no question asked."

Finally able to think it through, Linghu Chong had an ease of mind. With a long roar, he jumped backwards toward the opening of the cave. Turning his body around while still in mid-air, he opened his eyes again after landing squarely on the ground. Looking down at his feet, he found his feet almost on the edge of the steep cliff, only two feet from the

very brink of the cliff. If he had used just a little more strength when he jumped up and had landed two more feet further, he would have fallen into the bottomless abyss and have his body smashed into pieces. He had actually calculated the distance well in his head before he closed his eyes and jumped backwards. Since he had made his mind up to kill the Demon Cult members on first sight and didn't have any more burdens on his mind, he just wanted to have a little risky fun.

"I am still not brave enough. I should have jumped at least another feet closer to the edge for the real fun," Linghu Chong thought, when sounds of giggles and clapping suddenly rose from behind.

"Big apprentice brother! That was so cool!" It was the voice of Yue Lingshan.

Linghu Chong was very delighted. He turned around and saw Yue Lingshan carrying a meal basket.

"Big apprentice brother, I've brought you your dinner," Yue Lingshan announced happily. She sat the meal basket on the ground, went into the cave, and sat on the big rock facing the rock wall. "This is a really cool trick of yours! Let me give it a try."

Linghu Chong knew that this trick was indeed a very dangerous one. Even when he tried it earlier, he was ready to give it all up. Yue Lingshan's Kung Fu skills were much less compared to his, and if she couldn't calculate her strength right, it would be disastrous. But because she was really in the mood at the moment, he couldn't hold her back. So he stood right next to the brim of the cliff and waited.

Intending to make sure she could beat the big apprentice brother, Yue Lingshan went over the calculation in her head quickly and then pushed the ground hard with her toes. After her body had left the ground, she also turned her body around in the mid-air. Hoping to land closer to the edge of the cliff than Linghu Chong did, she used a little bit extra strength, but when her body started to fall, fear suddenly

overwhelmed her and she had to open her eyes. Seeing the bottomless abyss right in front of her eyes, she screamed in terror.

Linghu Chong reached out and caught her left arm while she was still in the air. When Yue Lingshan landed back onto the ground, she found her feet only one foot away from the very brink of the cliff. It was indeed closer than what Linghu Chong had achieved. Before her heart even had time to fall back into her chest, she was already claiming her victory.

“Big apprentice brother, I landed further than you did!”

Seeing her frightened face as white as a sheet, Linghu Chong patted her gingerly on the back. “Better not try this trick again. If Master or Master-Wife ever hear about this, they would definitely scold me harshly, maybe even punish me for another year of meditation facing the wall here.”

Yue Lingshan felt a little better now. She took two steps back and said with a big grin, “Then I need to be punished too. We can meditate facing the wall here together. Wouldn’t that be fun? We can have a contest everyday to see who can jump further.”

“Us two, meditate here together everyday?” Linghu Chong repeated the words while throwing a glance at the cave, a breeze of happiness swelling in his heart, thinking, “If I get to spend an entire year together with the little apprentice sister, here, without any disruptions, then I’d be as happy as a worry-free fairy. Alas, it will never happen.”

“I am afraid that Master will have you meditate in the ‘House of Integrity’ and ban you from leaving there, then we won’t be able to see each other for an entire year,” he said.

“That’s not fair!” Yue Lingshan immediately complained. “How come you can have fun here, and I have to be a prisoner in the ‘House of Integrity’?” Knowing clearly that her parents would have never allowed her to accompany the big apprentice brother here on the cliff, she changed the subject.

“Big apprentice brother, Mom told Monkey Six to bring you food everyday at first. I told Monkey Six, ‘Sixth

apprentice brother, I know you are a monkey and all that, but climbing up and down the 'Cliff of Contemplation' is no easy task. Why don't you let me help you and do it for you? So, how are you going to repay me for this favor?' Monkey Six said, 'I dare not to loaf on the job given by Master-Wife. Besides, big apprentice brother is the one that treats me the best. I am so glad that I'll be bringing food to him for an entire year and will be able to see him once everyday. I don't mind even if it's no easy task.' Big apprentice brother, don't you think Monkey Six is very mean?"

"Well, he was telling the truth." Linghu Chong smiled.

Yue Lingshan continued. "Monkey Six also said, 'I've always wanted to ask for advice from big apprentice brother about Kung Fu questions. But every time as soon as you show up, you'd be kicking me away, not allowing any more conversation with the big apprentice brother.' Big apprentice brother, do I ever do things like that? Isn't Monkey Six talking garbage here? He then said, 'Hey, for the entire next year, I will be the only one who can go up the 'Cliff of Contemplation' to see big apprentice brother. You won't even have a chance.' I got mad, but he paid no attention. Later... later...."

"Later you threatened him with your sword?" Linghu Chong guessed.

"No." Yue Lingshan shook her head. "Later I got real upset and started crying. Monkey Six then came to me and begged me to bring food to you."

Staring at her cute little face, Linghu Chong could see the slight swelling right next to her eyes. Sure enough, she must have had quite some weeping. Deeply moved, he thought, "She is so good to me. I'd be willing to die a thousand times for her."

Yue Lingshan opened the meal basket. Taking out two plates of dishes, together with two pairs of chopsticks and two rice bowls, she set them on a big rock with a flat top.

"Two sets of chopsticks?" Linghu Chong uttered.



“I’ll eat together with you. Look, what’s this?” Yue Lingshan’s face split into a big grin when she took out a small wine-calabash from the bottom of the meal basket.

Linghu Chong was very addicted to wine. Seeing the calabash of wine, he stood up and bowed deeply to Yue Lingshan. “Thank you so-o-o much!! I’ve been worrying about having no wine to drink for an entire year. You just saved my life!”

Yue Lingshan uncorked the wine-calabash and then passed it to Linghu Chong. “There’s not much here. I can only steal one small calabash of wine for you everyday. If I try to steal too much, my mom might find out about it,” she explained with a smile.

The Huashan Sword School rule said that an apprentice meditating on the “Cliff of Contemplation” would be prohibited from eating any meat, which was why the kitchen only prepared a big plate of boiled vegetables and a plate of Tofu for Linghu Chong. But considering herself going through the punishment together with her big apprentice brother, Yue Lingshan found the dishes quite enjoyable. After dinner, the two chatted with no specific topics for another hour. Only when it was already in the nightfall, did Yue Lingshan go down the cliff.

From then on, Yue Lingshan would bring food up the cliff around dusk everyday, and the two would have dinner together. At noon the next day, Linghu Chong simply ate the leftovers from previous day’s dinner as his lunch.

Although Linghu Chong lived alone atop the cliff, he didn’t feel lonely at all. Every morning after he woke up, he would meditate with breathing exercises and also practice the Huashan style inner energy and the sword arts taught by his Master. He also spent time pondering upon and going over Tian Boguang’s fast knife chops and the move created by Master-Wife – Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning. There was only one thrust in this The Thrust of Ning move, but it contained many techniques from Huashan style

inner energy and Huashan sword arts. Linghu Chong knew that he was not at the level to execute this move yet. If he had tried to use it, he would only make a fool out of himself, so he worked hard everyday in advancing himself with his Kung Fu skills. Thus, although he was punished to meditate by facing the wall to think over his mistakes, he didn't do any of those. Other than having some chats with Yue Lingshan every evening, he simply worked hard on his Kung Fu skills with dedication. Two months passed like that, and it started to get colder and colder each day atop the cliff. Some more days later, Madam Yue finished making Linghu Chong a new set of cotton-padded coat and had Lu Dayou bring it to him up the cliff.

One day, a windstorm swept by in the morning, and by noon, big snowflakes had started swirling out of the sky. Seeing the heavy dark clouds gathering in the sky, Linghu Chong could tell that the snow would be lasting for quite a while. "The road up the cliff is very steep and dangerous. By dusk the road must be very slippery. Little apprentice sister shouldn't try to bring me any food in a day like this," he couldn't help thinking. But there was no way of communication for him to send the message. In great worries, he could only wish that Master and Master-Wife would know about this and stop little apprentice sister from coming.

"How could Master and Master-Wife not know about the fact that little apprentice sister has been bringing food for me instead of sixth apprentice brother? Maybe they just pretended to not know and paid no attention. If little apprentice sister tried to climb up the cliff today, a single slip would cost her life. I guess Master-Wife would ban her from climbing up the cliff for sure," he thought.

Linghu Chong waited anxiously until dusk, casting a glance down the cliff every once a while. Seeing that it was getting darker and darker and Yue Lingshan never showed up, Linghu Chong felt a bit relieved. "Tomorrow morning,

sixth apprentice brother will bring the food up. I hope little apprentice sister will never take on the risks."

He was about to go back in the cave to sleep when rustling sounds of somebody climbing the snow-covered road to the cliff came to his attention. Then Yue Lingshan's voice rose, "Big apprentice brother...big apprentice brother...!"

Greatly surprised but also greatly delighted, Linghu Chong rushed by the side of the cliff. In the shower of the big snowflakes, he could see Yue Lingshan struggle her way up the cliff in slips and skids. Restricted by the order from the Master, Linghu Chong dared not to step even one step down the cliff, only reaching out with his hand to try to catch Yue Lingshan. As soon as Yue Lingshan's left hand touched his right hand, Linghu Chong grabbed onto her wrist and pulled her up the cliff. Under the dim light, Yue Lingshan appeared to have snow all over her; even her hairs were covered in snow. There was a big swelling on the left side of her forehead and blood was still dripping down slowly from the cut. "You...you...." Linghu Chong was lost in words.

Yue Lingshan bit her lip as if she was going to start crying. "I fell, and the meal basket fell into the valley. You... you'll be hungry tonight."

Linghu Chong's heart was swelled with gratefulness and with compassion. He pressed gingerly on her wound with his sleeve and said affectionately, "Little apprentice sister! The mountain road is too slippery. You shouldn't have come up here."

"I don't want you to starve. And...and, I wanted to see you," Yue Lingshan muttered.

"But if you had fallen into the valley as a result, how could I ever face Master and Master-Wife again?" Linghu Chong said.

"Get rid of that worrying face of yours! See, I am fine here. It's just that I am too impotent. I lost the meal basket and the wine-calabash right before I almost made it up the cliff," Yue Lingshan said.

"I only want you to be safe. I don't mind if I have to starve for ten days," Linghu Chong said compassionately.

"Half way up, the road was so slippery. I gathered all my inner energy and jumped a couple of times. Hey, I actually made it up that real steep slope by the 'Five Pine-Trees.' I was so scared of falling down into the valley at that moment." Yue Lingshan gasped.

"Little apprentice sister," Linghu Chong demanded, "promise me that you'll never risk your life for me again. If you had really fallen down into the valley, I would have jumped down after you for sure."

Yue Lingshan looked at Linghu Chong with warmth and happiness blazing in her eyes. "Big apprentice brother, why do you worry so much? If I had fallen down on my way to bring you food, it would be the result of my own carelessness. Why would you feel so guilty?"

"It's not about feeling guilty." Linghu Chong shook his head slowly. "If it were sixth apprentice brother who was bringing food to me and fell down into the valley and got killed, will I jump down the valley after him?" He shook his head slowly as he spoke. "I will try my best to take good care of his parents and his family. But I won't jump off the cliff to die along with a friend."

"But if I had died, then you wouldn't want to live any more?" Yue Lingshan asked slowly.

"That's correct. Little apprentice sister, it wasn't because you were bringing me food. Even if you were bringing food for someone else and died because of that, I wouldn't have wanted to stay alive."

Yue Lingshan gripped onto Linghu Chong's hands tightly, her heart filled with tenderness and affection. "Big apprentice brother!" she called out gently.

Linghu Chong had an urge to embrace her in his arms, but still couldn't gather enough courage to do so. The two of them simply stared at each other quietly, neither one moved

an inch. Big snowflakes kept pouring down from the sky and soon the two looked almost like two snowmen.

After a long while, Linghu Chong finally broke the silence. "You can't go down the cliff all by yourself tonight. Did Master and Master-Wife know that you came up here? It would be better if they can send someone up to get you."

"This morning, out of the blue, Dad received a letter from the Songshan Sword School's Alliance Chief Zuo, saying that they need to discuss something urgent, so he and Mom had left Mount Huashan today," Yue Lingshan said.

"Then does anyone else know that you came up here?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Nope. Nobody. Second, third, forth apprentice brothers and Monkey Six all headed to Mount Songshan together with Mom and Dad, and no one knows that I came up the cliff to see you. Otherwise, Monkey Six would have fought with me for the chance to bring food up for you, and that would be very troublesome! Oh, that's right. The chap Lin Pingzhi saw me coming up. But I told him to shut his mouth if he wanted to be spared of a good beating tomorrow."

"Wow, what an impressive senior apprentice sister." Linghu Chong grinned.

"Of course!" Yue Lingshan let out a big smile. "Somebody is finally calling me senior apprentice sister now. If I don't put on the manner of a senior, what a waste would that be? It's not like you. Everybody calls you the big apprentice brother. What do you care?" The two of them broke into a laugh.

"Well, then you can't go back down tonight. Why don't you spend the night in the cave and plan on going back down tomorrow morning?"

Linghu Chong held Yue Lingshan's hand and walked her into the cave. The cave was quite small, just big enough for the two of them to stay in, and not much room left after that. The two of them sat down facing each other and chatted until late night. Yue Lingshan finally dozed off and fell asleep. Afraid that she might catch a cold, Linghu Chong took off the

cotton-padded coat he was wearing and tucked it around her. In the dim light reflected by the snow outside, he could vaguely see her cute little face.

“Little apprentice sister has such deep affection for me. Even if I have to die for her and be smashed into ten thousand pieces, I will not regret it,” Linghu Chong thought to himself.

In the silence, he soon fell into an even deeper thought. “I lost my parents when I was still little. Luckily, Master and Master-Wife brought me up and treated me like their own son. I am the head apprentice of the Huashan Sword School. Not only did I become an apprentice earlier than everybody else, but also my Kung Fu skills were way above the rest of the apprentice brothers. One day I will probably take over the responsibility from Master and become the Head Master of Huashan. Now with little apprentice sister treating me like this, it would be impossible for me to ever repay the great kindness from my Master. But I’ve always been doing things with no restraint and have kept Master and Master-Wife angry with me. I’ve really disappointed their expectations. I must thoroughly rectify my errors starting from now on. Otherwise, I would be failing not only Master and Master-Wife, but also little apprentice sister.”

Staring at the lovely hair of Yue Lingshan, which rustled gently from her breathing, Linghu Chong drifted into deep thoughts when he suddenly heard Yue Lingshan murmuring, “Hey, chap Lin, you are not behaving yourself! Come over here to let me give you a good beating!”

Linghu Chong was surprised. But seeing Yue Lingshan turning her body to the side with her eyes shut tight and her breathing falling back into a normal rhythm, he realized that she was just having a dream. Quite amused, he thought, “Finally getting to be a senior apprentice sister to someone, she probably has been acting in a real cocky way. During these days, apprentice brother Lin must have been ordered

around left and right, and probably had enough of suffering. She can't even stop bullying him in her dreams."

Guarding by Yue Lingshan's side, Linghu Chong did not sleep at all. Yue Lingshan had been totally exhausted the previous evening, so she slept till late the next morning before waking up. Finding Linghu Chong staring at her with a smile, she returned with a smile and then said with a yawn, "Did you wake up early in the morning?"

Linghu Chong didn't tell her that he had not slept at all during the night. "What dream did you have? Did you beat up apprentice brother Lin?" he asked with a grin.

"Did you hear me talk in my dreams?" Yue Lingshan asked after thinking for a moment. "This chap Lin is so stubborn. He just doesn't want to listen to me. Ha-ha, I scold him not only in day times, but also when I am sleeping."

"How did he get on your nerves?" Linghu Chong asked.

"I dreamed that I had asked him to go practice sword skills with me in the waterfall, but he had all kinds of excuses and simply didn't want to go with me. I finally tricked him into going. And as soon as he got to the waterfall, I pushed him down the waterfall."

"Oops, you can't do that. You are going to get him killed," Linghu Chong commented with a smile.

"It's only a dream. It's not real. Why are you worrying so much? Are you afraid that I really might kill this chap?"

"Well, what one thinks about in day time, one dreams about it at night. You must have really thought about killing apprentice brother Lin during the day, and you kept thinking about it, that's why you dreamed about it at night."

Yue Lingshan showed a winkled nose. "This chap is useless. He has been practicing the entry-level sword art form for three months now, and it still looked far from right. Yet he is the dedicated type and kept practicing days and nights. I get mad just looking at him practicing. What do I have to think about if I want to kill him? All I need to do is to raise my sword and then bring the sword swishing sideways. A

sure kill with a single blow!" She slashed out with her right hand and performed a move of Huashan sword arts.

"Cloud by the Hill - Chap Lin's head falls off!" Linghu Chong burst into laughter.

"If I actually use this Cloud by the Hill move, his head will fall off for sure." Yue Lingshan giggled loudly.

"You are the senior apprentice sister. When a junior apprentice brother has problem with his sword practice, you should be giving him some pointers, not drawing your sword to kill for no specific reasons. All new apprentices of the Master will be your junior apprentice brothers. What if when Master takes in one hundred new apprentices, and you decided to kill ninety-nine of them in a couple of days? What are we going to do then?" Linghu Chong joked.

"You are absolutely right about that! I'll only kill ninety-nine of them and make sure I leave one alone. If I kill all of them, then who is going to call me senior apprentice sister?" Yue Lingshan held onto the side of the rock wall and almost laughed herself silly.

"If you killed ninety-nine junior apprentice brothers, the one hundredth one would be running away for sure. You still won't be able to maintain your senior apprentice sister status." Linghu Chong suggested.

"By then I'll make you call me senior apprentice sister." Yue Lingshan grinned.

"I have no problem calling you senior apprentice sister. But are you going to kill me or not?" Linghu Chong asked jokingly.

"If you listen to my orders, then I won't kill you. If you don't, then I will." Yue Lingshan also said jokingly.

"Little apprentice sister, I beg you to show some mercy with your sword!"

It had stopped snowing by then. Afraid that when apprentice brothers and sisters found out that Yue Lingshan had been missing they might start slanderous gossips, which could be disastrous for little apprentice sister's reputation,



Linghu Chong urged Yue Lingshan to go back down after some short chats.

"I want to stay here a bit longer to play. Mom and Dad are both not at home. It's very boring!" Yue Lingshan still didn't want to go.

"My good apprentice sister, in the last couple of days, I just created some more moves for the Chong-Ling Sword Art. As soon as I can leave the cliff, I'll go with you to practice sword skills in the waterfall. Alright?"

After quite some coaxing, Linghu Chong finally succeeded in getting her off the cliff back home.

At dusk that day, Gao Gengming brought food up the cliff instead. He said that Yue Lingshan caught a cold and was having fevers. She had to rest in bed, but she thought about the big apprentice brother and had asked him to make sure not to forget bringing some wine when he brought the food up. Linghu Chong was greatly shocked and became extremely worried. He knew that she had a terrible fall the previous evening and was probably terribly scared, which caused all the illness, and wished dearly that he would be able to rush down the cliff to pay a visit to her. Although he had starved for two days, with the meal right in front of him, he only felt a lump in his throat and could hardly swallow.

Gao Gengming knew that big apprentice brother and the little apprentice sister were a loving couple, and that was why as soon as Linghu Chong heard about her illness, he became very worried. So he tried to comfort him.

"Big apprentice brother, don't be too worried. Yesterday we had a lot of snow. Little apprentice sister must have spent too much time in the snow playing and caught a cold. For people who practice inner energy like us, such a little cold is really nothing. After taking some medicines, it will be gone in no time," he persuaded.

But Yue Lingshan remained sick for over two weeks. Only after the Yue couple had returned to Mount Huashan and rid the fever for her using Huashan style inner energy was she

able to recover slowly. By the time she was finally able to get up to the cliff, it was already over twenty days later.

After suffering such a long parting, both felt great joy tempered with sorrow. Yue Lingshan stared at Linghu Chong's face and burst out a cry, "Big apprentice brother, did you get sick too? How come you look so thin?"

Linghu Chong shook his head. "I didn't get sick. I...I...."

"You...you were thinking of me. And you lost weight because of the worries." Yue Lingshan suddenly realized. She burst into tears. "Big apprentice brother, I am all recovered by now."

"I watched the road days and nights waiting for this very moment. Thank Heavens! You came at last!" Linghu Chong muttered, holding Yue Lingshan's hand tightly.

"Actually, I saw you many times," Yue Lingshan said.

"What? You saw me many times?" Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

"Yeah! While I was ill, I saw you all the time when I closed my eyes. That day when my fever worsened, Mom said that I kept talking to you in my dreams. Big apprentice brother, Mom has learned about that night when I spent the night up here."

Linghu Chong blushed and felt some uneasiness. "Was Master-Wife angry?" he asked.

"Mom wasn't angry about it. But...but...." Yue Lingshan suddenly blushed and stopped abruptly.

"But what?" Linghu Chong asked.

"I am not telling you," Yue Lingshan declared.

Noticing the affected shy expression on Yue Lingshan's face, Linghu Chong's heart quivered. He immediately pulled himself together and said, "Little apprentice sister, you just got better. You really shouldn't come up here so soon. I knew you were gradually getting better. Everyday when fifth apprentice brother or sixth apprentice brother brought food up for me, they all told me about you."

"Then how come you are still so thin?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"Well, as soon as you fully recover, I will gain my weight back." Linghu Chong answered with a smile.

"Tell me the truth. How much did you eat at each meal these days? Monkey Six said that you didn't touch your food at all and only drank a lot of wine. He tried to persuade you, but you simply wouldn't listen to him. Big apprentice brother, why don't you...take good care of yourself?" At those words, tear drops started rolling in her eyes again.

"Nonsense! Don't listen to him. Monkey Six always likes to exaggerate. Why would I only drink wine and not eat?" Linghu Chong denied.

A breeze of cold wind swept by and sent Yue Lingshan shivering. It was a very chilly day. The cliff didn't even have a single tree to block the cold wind. It was already very cold on top of Mount Huashan; it was even colder here on the cliff.

"Little apprentice sister," Linghu Chong said quickly, "you have not fully recovered yet. You'd better not catch a cold again. Go back down the cliff. Wait till one day when the sun comes out and after you have fully recovered, then you can come up to see me again."

"I'm not cold. We are getting snow and windstorms everyday. Who knows when we will have sunshine again?" Yue Lingshan complained.

"But what if you get sick again? I...I..." Linghu Chong said in a worried tone.

Seeing the thin and pallid face of Linghu Chong, Yue Lingshan thought, "If I get sick again, he'll get sick too for sure. That will surely get him killed with no one here taking care of him at all." So she had to agree. "Fine. I am leaving now. You take good care of yourself. Don't drink that much wine. Have at least three bowls of rice every meal. I'll go talk to Dad and tell him that you are not feeling well. You need more nutritious food. You can't live off only vegetables."

"I will not violate the prohibition. Seeing you getting better is enough nourish for me already. I am sure I will start gaining weight in a couple of days. My dear, please go back now," Linghu Chong urged.

"What did you call me?" Her cheeks going red, Yue Lingshan asked in a low voice, love and affection swelling in her eyes.

Feeling a little bit shy, Linghu Chong immediately answered, "I just blurted that out. Little apprentice sister, please don't mind."

"Why would I mind? I like you to call me that." Yue Lingshan replied.

Linghu Chong felt a warm current coursing through his heart. All he could think of was to embrace her tightly in his arms. But he immediately told himself, "She has shown me such affection. How could I ever disgrace her with such disrespectful behavior?" So he turned his head aside in a hurry, and only said in a soft voice, "Walk slow when you go down the cliff, one step at a time. Take a rest if you need to. Don't just run all the way down like you used to do in other days."

"I won't," Yue Lingshan answered as she turned around slowly and walked toward the road down the cliff.

Hearing the sound of her steps getting further and further, Linghu Chong turned his head back, only seeing Yue Lingshan standing a few dozen feet away down the road staring at him. For a long while, the two just stared at each other silently.

"Walk slow. It's time for you to get back," Linghu Chong finally said.

"Yes," Yue Lingshan answered and this time really started heading back.

In that day, Linghu Chong felt a kind of joy he had never experienced before in his entire life. Sitting on the rock, he couldn't resist his urge to laugh out loud. He suddenly burst out a long roar, and it echoed around the valley again and

again. The roar seemed to be shouting the words, "I am so happy! I am so happy!"

The next day, it snowed again, and sure enough, Yue Lingshan did not come up. Linghu Chong heard from Lu Dayou that she was enjoying a speedy recovery and was getting better and better everyday. That truly cheered him up.

Another twenty or so days passed before Yue Lingshan came up the cliff again. She had a basket full of Zong-Zi<sup>51</sup> this time. After looking at Linghu Chong's face carefully for a moment, she smiled. "You didn't lie. You sure gained quite a few pounds back."

"You've recovered well. I am so happy to see you healthy." Seeing the ruddy complexion on Yue Lingshan's cheeks, Linghu Chong also smiled.

"I've been bugging Mom every day so that I could bring your food up, but Mom just wouldn't let me. She kept saying that it was too cold, or it was too humid. She almost sounded as if as soon as I come up the cliff, I'll drop dead. I said that big apprentice brother has stayed on the cliff for days and nights. I don't see him getting sick. Mom said that big apprentice brother has very high inner energy; I am simply not in the same league. Hey, Mom was praising about you. Aren't you happy to hear that?"

Linghu Chong nodded. "I really miss Master and Master-Wife. I wish I could see them soon."

"Yesterday I spent a whole day helping Mom wrapping Zong-Zi. I thought to myself, wouldn't it be nice if I could bring you some? And guess what? Before I even opened my mouth to ask today, Mom had already said to me, 'Take this basket of Zong-Zi to Chong.' What a surprise!"

Linghu Chong felt a lump in his throat, thinking, "Master-Wife is so nice to me."

"These Zong-Zi just came out of the pot; they are still hot. Let me peel some for you." Yue Lingshan went in the

cave and started unwrapping the bamboo leaves outside of the Zong-Zi. Soon, an appetizing smell filled the small cave.

Taking the unwrapped Zong-Zi Yue Lingshan handed to him, Linghu Chong took a bite. Even though the Zong-Zi only had vegetarian stuffing, the mixture of straw mushrooms, lotus seeds, broad beans and other ingredients gave it a very delicious flavor.

"Little Lin and I picked those straw mushrooms the day before yesterday....," Yue Lingshan bragged.

"Little Lin?" Linghu Chong was lost.

"Oh, That's junior apprentice brother Lin. I've been calling him Little Lin these days. He came to me the day before yesterday and told me that there was straw mushrooms under those pine trees at the east slope. He even went with me and spent half a day picking them. But we only found enough to fill a half basket. While there's not much, it sure is tasty, isn't it?"

"Yummy! I almost swallowed my tongue together with it. So, little apprentice sister, you don't yell at him now?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Why not! Anytime he doesn't listen to me, I yell at him. But he sure learned how to behave himself these days, so I don't yell at him as much now. And when he works hard and progress a little with his sword practice, I praise him a little, 'Aha, Little Lin, this move looks not too shabby, much better than yesterday. But it's still not fast enough. Practice more! Practice more!' Ha-ha!" Yue Lingshan said amusingly.

"Are you teaching him sword arts?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Yep! He speaks Fujian dialect. Apprentice brothers and sisters are having a hard time understanding him. I've been to Fuzhou before and it's easier for me to understand his words, so Dad asked me to help him with his sword art whenever I have time. Big apprentice brother, since I can't come up here to see you all the time, when I get bored, I might as well teach him a couple of moves. Little Lin is no dummy. He can learn quickly."

"I see. So you are the senior apprentice sister and the instructor. No wonder he dares not to disobey you." Linghu Chong laughed.

"I wouldn't say that. Yesterday when I asked him to go hunt pheasants with me, he didn't want to go, and said that he had not gotten the moves White Aurora Shooting to Sun and Heaven Hanging Upside Down right and needed to practice more."

Linghu Chong was a bit surprised. He asked, "He has only been in our Huashan Sword School for several months, how come he is already practicing moves like White Aurora Shooting to Sun and Heaven Hanging Upside Down? Little apprentice sister, our Huashan sword arts require the practitioner to follow each of the steps. It would be harmful to try to advance too quickly."

"Don't worry about it. I won't be teaching him irresponsibly," Yue Lingshan explained. "Little Lin is always eager to excel. He practices days and nights. Every time when I want to chat a little, in less than three sentences, he would start asking questions about sword arts. Sword forms that will take others three months to grasp will only take him half a month. When I wanted him to go play with me, he would never agree frankly."

Linghu Chong fell silent, and all of a sudden, some kind of indescribable annoyance filled his heart. He took another bite, and then just stared at the Zong-Zi in his hand blankly.

"Big apprentice brother, did you swallow your tongue? Why have you stopped talking?" Yue Lingshan pulled at Linghu Chong's sleeves.

Absentmindedly, Linghu Chong put the remaining of the Zong-Zi in his mouth. Somehow, the supposedly delicious Zong-Zi got stuck in his mouth and he couldn't swallow it down.

Yue Lingshan pointed at him and giggled hard. "Aren't you too impatient? See, you got it stuck to your teeth."

With a wry smile, Linghu Chong swallowed hard and finally managed to send it down his throat. He thought to himself, "I am really being stupid! Little apprentice sister loves to play. Since I can't go down the cliff, she wanted apprentice brother Lin to be her company. That's really quite normal. Why am I being so narrow-minded and getting mad at that?" So he relaxed a little and said with a smile, "You must have worked on this one. See how tight did you wrap it? It got my tongue and my teeth all stuck together."

Yue Lingshan burst into loud laughter. After a few moments, she commented, "Poor big apprentice brother, who has to be a prisoner on top of the cliff. See how gluttonous you are!"

The next time when she came up the cliff again, it was already over ten days later. Other than the meal basket, she also brought a small basket with half basket of pine nuts and chestnuts.

During the ten days, Linghu Chong's neck probably had gotten longer from all the anxious looking down the cliff. Every time he asked about little apprentice sister from Lu Dayou when he brought food up, Lu Dayou would always look queer and speak in an odd way. Linghu Chong got suspicious, but simply couldn't get a straight answer out of him. When Linghu Chong pressed really hard sometimes, Lu Dayou would always answer, "Little apprentice sister is doing great. She practices sword art diligently everyday. Maybe Master didn't want her up the cliff so she wouldn't be disturbing big apprentice brother's meditation here."

Now when he finally saw Yue Lingshan again after all the waiting, his joy was unspeakable. She seemed to be glowing with health and radiating vigor, looking even prettier than how she looked before the illness. Linghu Chong couldn't help but think, "She has fully recovered. Why did she wait so long before coming up the cliff again? Did Master or Master-Wife ban her from coming up here?"



Seeing the puzzled look in Linghu Chong's eyes, Yue Lingshan suddenly blushed. "Big apprentice brother, I hadn't come up to see you for so many days. Are you mad at me?" she asked.

"Why would I be mad? Master and Master-Wife must have told you not to come up, haven't you?" Linghu Chong said.

"Yeah. Mom just taught me a new sword art form. She said that this sword art form has so many complicated variations, if I had come up the cliff to chat with you, I'd lose my focus."

"Which sword art form?" Linghu Chong asked curiously.

"Take a guess!" Yue Lingshan challenged.

"Yang-Wu Sword Form?"

"Nope."

"Xi-Wu Sword Form?"

"Try again!" Yue Lingshan shook her head.

"Could it be the Fair-Maiden Sword Form?"

"That's my mom's specialty. I am not even qualified to give the Fair-Maiden Sword Form a try yet." Yue Lingshan stuck her tongue out and made a face. "Ok, let me tell you. It's The Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword!" she said triumphantly.

Linghu Chong was taken by slight surprise. "You start to learn The Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword now? Oh, that really is a very complicated sword form," he said happily. All his suspicion melted away.

Although the set of Jade Maiden Sword form only had nineteen stances, every stance had very complicated changes and variations. If the practitioner couldn't memorize all those, he wouldn't even be able to fully use just one stance. He had heard from Master about it before, "The Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword mainly focus in the fancy variations and changes. The form is quite different from our school's main focus - Inner Energy Drives the Sword. Since female apprentices tend to have less strength from their arms, when they encounter with a tougher

opponent, they can use this sword form to counter with artful moves. But all the male apprentices have no need to learn it." That's why even Linghu Chong himself had not learned it before. Based on Yue Lingshan's current skill level, it seemed that she was not ready to learn this sword form yet. Before, Linghu Chong, Yue Lingshan and some other apprentice brothers and sisters had watched how Master and Master-Wife showed the set of sword form. Master had attacked using many different sword art forms from different sword schools and styles, but Master-Wife only defended with this Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword form. The Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword were actually well matched with the hundreds of excellent sword moves in a dozen different styles. All the apprentices watching by the side were dumbfounded in amazement. Yue Lingshan had begged her mother to teach her this sword form by then, and Madam Yue had answered, "You are still too young. First, you don't have the skill level yet. Secondly, this sword art form requires a lot of brainpower. You should probably wait till you are twenty years old before learning this sword form. In addition, this sword form is used for countering sword moves from other sword schools. If you only work with apprentice brothers and sisters in our own school, you'd end up practicing how to counter Huashan sword art. Chong knows a lot of different Kung Fu and he probably remembers many different sword moves from other sword schools. He can probably practice with you in the future." This was an episode that happened about two years ago, and nobody ever mentioned it again. Who'd expect that Master-Wife actually taught her this sword form?

"Master must be in a real good mood these days to practice sword art with you everyday," Linghu Chong said.

This sword form focused on adapting itself to changing conditions and not restricting oneself to certain moves or postures, that was why right from the beginning, the practitioner would need to practice with a partner. Within the

Huashan Sword School, Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong were the only two having good knowledge about sword arts from other sword schools. Thus, since Yue Lingshan was learning The Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword, Yue Buqun had to be working with her to attack her with other sword school's sword moves.

Yue Lingshan flushed slightly again. "Dad doesn't have that much time. It was Little Lin who helped me to practice," she said bashfully.

"Apprentice brother Lin? Does he know many sword moves from other sword schools?" Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

"He only knows the family Kung Fu of his - Evil-Resisting Sword Art. Dad said that even though the Evil-Resisting Sword Art isn't that powerful at all, it has some interesting variations in the moves, which would be good for me to compare to. He wanted me to counter Evil-Resisting Sword Art as the starting point for my Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword training."

"I see." Linghu Chong nodded.

"Big apprentice brother, are you upset?"

"No. Why would I be upset? You are learning an advanced form of our Huashan sword arts now. I feel very happy for you! Why should I be upset?"

"But you don't look very happy."

"Which stance are you on now?" Linghu Chong squeezed out a smile and asked.

Yue Lingshan didn't answer. After a long time, she finally said, "I see. Mom said to let you help me practice, but I am having Little Lin do it, that's why you are upset. Am I right? But think about it, big apprentice brother, in the short while, you won't be able to come down from the cliff, and I am just too anxious to learn this sword form. I just can't wait for you any longer."

"You are talking childishly again. We are all apprentice brothers and sisters, so it's all the same no matter who

practices with you,” Linghu Chong said in laughter. He paused for a second and then went on, “I know you’d rather have apprentice brother Lin practice with you than having me.”

“Nonsense!” Yue Lingshan blushed again. “Compared to you, Little Lin’s skill level is miles away. What good does it do me practicing with him?”

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Apprentice brother Lin has only joined the Huashan Sword School for several months. Even if he were a super genius, how good could he get?” So he said, “Of course there’s benefit here. Wouldn’t you feel great when you can beat him with every single one of your moves?”

“Humph, just with his clumsy Evil-Resisting Sword Art, does he actually expect to defeat me?” Yue Lingshan giggled.

Linghu Chong had long known that the little apprentice sister was the type who always wanted to win. When she sparred with Lin Pingzhi, most likely she was able to use the newly learned sword art with facility, and was able to enjoy advantage with every single move. Lin Pingzhi’s Kung Fu level was very low, and he probably made a perfect spar partner. When Linghu Chong thought about that, his depression went away immediately. “Then let me try a couple moves with you. Let’s see how good you are with your Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword,” he suggested, smiling.

Yue Lingshan was overjoyed. “Wonderful! Today...today before I came up...I actually planned....” With a shy smile, she drew her long sword.

“You came up the cliff today just to show me the sword art you just learned? Good, go ahead!” Linghu Chong said.

“Big apprentice brother, your sword skills have always been better than mine. But after I learn this set of Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword well, you won’t be able to bully me anymore.” Yue Lingshan grinned.

“When did I ever bully you? You are wronging the good guy here.”

“Don’t you want to draw your sword?” Yue Lingshan got into her starting position.

“Not so soon!” Linghu Chong said. He shifted his left hand into the starting position and then thrust his right hand out quickly. “This is from the Qingcheng Sword School’s Pine-Wind Sword Art. This move is called Thundering Pine Wave!” He pretended that his hand was a sword and thrust it toward Yue Lingshan’s shoulder.

Yue Lingshan turned to the side and stepped back while waving her sword to block toward Linghu Chong’s hand. “Look out!” she called out.

“Don’t try to be nice. I’ll draw my sword when I can’t defend myself.”

“How dare you fight my Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword with your bare hands?” Yue Lingshan snapped.

“That’s because you have not mastered it. Once you master it, I won’t be able to fight you with my bare hands.”

Yue Lingshan had been practicing the Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword very hard these days. She felt that she had advanced quite a lot in her sword skills, and even if compared to first class sword masters in the Martial World, she would be no less. The reason why she didn’t come up the cliff for the last ten days was to keep this a secret from Linghu Chong, so she could give him a big surprise with one brilliant feat, and thus make Linghu Chong think highly of her. But now he was actually belittling her and only wanted to fight her Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword with his bare hands, she couldn’t help but feeling annoyed.

“If by accident I cut you or something, don’t blame me. Don’t tell my mom or dad either.” She pulled a long face.

“That’s of course. You do your best. If you give ground in anyway, you wouldn’t be showing your true skills.” Linghu Chong’s left hand suddenly chopped out as he spoke. “Look out!” he yelled.

“What...what! Is your left hand a sword too?” Yue Lingshan shouted in astonishment.

If Linghu Chong had really chopped down, Yue Lingshan would have been injured in the shoulder. He held on his strength and explained, “Some people in the Qingcheng Sword School do use double swords.”

“That’s right! I’ve seen some Qingcheng apprentices carrying double swords. How did I forget that? Watch out!” Yue Lingshan launched a counter attack.

Seeing that the thrust drifted swiftly, Linghu Chong figured this must be an advanced move out of the Jade Maiden Sword. He praised, “This one is very good. Just not fast enough.”

“Still not fast enough? A little bit faster, I would have chopped off your arm.”

“Go ahead and try to chop it off.” Linghu Chong used his right hand as the sword and chopped toward her left arm.

Yue Lingshan was a bit annoyed. She waved her sword quickly and swiftly and started using the Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword she had been practicing one move after another. Out of the total nineteen stances of moves, she could only remember nine, and within the nine stances, she could really only use six. But these six stances were already quite powerful. Whenever she pointed the sword somewhere, Linghu Chong would have a hard time getting close to her in that direction. Linghu Chong circled around her as they fought. Every time when he tried to attack his way in, he was forced back by her sharp sword moves. Once he had to jump backward quickly and ended up bumping his back on a piece of rock that was sticking out.

Yue Lingshan was very pleased with herself. She asked in a grin, “Don’t you want to draw your sword now?”

“Just a little bit longer,” Linghu Chong said, as he lured her into using one move after another out of the Jade Maiden Sword form. After a few more moments of fighting, noticing Yue Lingshan used the same six stances again and again,

Linghu Chong figured it out. He abruptly stepped forward and chopped with his right knife hand. "Killer move from the Pine-Wind Sword Art! Watch out!" he yelled. The chop looked as if it had a lot of strength in it.

Seeing the knife hand swishing down toward her head, Yue Lingshan slashed her sword upwards. That was exactly the move Linghu Chong had expected. He reached out his left hand in a flash and flicked out with his middle finger. "Ring," his finger knocked on the blade of the long sword. Yue Lingshan only felt a burning pain in her palm and could no longer hold on to the sword. The sword flew out of her grip and fell straight down the bottomless abyss.

Her face as pale as a white sheet, Yue Lingshan stared silently at Linghu Chong in disbelief and astonishment, biting her lower lip hard with her upper teeth. "Oops!" Linghu Chong cried, and immediately rushed by the edge of the cliff, but the sword has disappeared in the bottomless valley and could no longer be seen. Suddenly, a green shadow flashed by the side of the cliff. It seemed to have been a piece of a robe. But when Linghu Chong looked more carefully, it was already gone. His heart thumped hard as he thought inwardly, "What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me? I've practiced and sparred with little apprentice sister thousands of times before. Every time I would give ground to her and had never acted so mercilessly like today. I am really being ridiculous!"

Yue Lingshan cast a sideways look down the valley as she cried out loud, "The sword! The sword!"

Linghu Chong was stunned when he suddenly remembered that little apprentice sister's long sword was an exceptional sword that could cut steel. It was called "Sword of the Green Pool," and was acquired by Master in Dragon-Spring, Zhejiang Province<sup>52</sup> three years ago. Ever since little apprentice sister laid eyes on it, she could not keep her mind off it. She had begged for it from Master many times and Master never agreed until her eighteenth birthday this year

when Master gave the sword to her as her birthday present. Now the sword had fallen into the bottomless valley, there would be no way to retrieve it back.

“What a terrible mistake have I made?” Linghu Chong regretted full heartedly.

Tears rolling in her eyes, Yue Lingshan stomped her left foot in frustration and then turned around to leave.

“Little apprentice sister!” Linghu Chong called out, but Yue Lingshan ignored him and started heading off the cliff. Linghu Chong chased her to the side of the cliff and reached out for her arm, but as soon as his fingers touched Yue Lingshan’s sleeve, he drew his arm back and watched her leave without ever looking back.

Feeling very depressed, Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Normally I would have put up with her and give in to her, but why did I flick away her sword today? Am I envying her because Master-Wife taught her the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword? No, no way. It can’t be! The Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword were meant for female apprentices, and wouldn’t I be happier that little apprentice sister is learning more Kung Fu? Ah, probably it’s because I have been alone on the cliff for too long and have become ill tempered. I only wish she would come up the cliff again tomorrow so I can apologize to her sincerely.”

That night Linghu Chong could not sleep. He sat cross-legged on a rock and tried to work on his breathing exercise, but he simply could not stay focus, and he dared not to continue. Moonlight shone through the opening of the cave and lit the rock wall. Noticing the words “Feng Qingyang” carved on the rock wall again, Linghu Chong reached out and started writing following the strokes carved on the rock wall. Suddenly, the wall darkened as a shadow was cast upon the rock wall. In astonishment, Linghu Chong picked up the sword by his side, with no time to unsheathe the sword, he just thrust it toward his back. When it was half way out, he suddenly retracted his strength and turned around as he



called out in joy, "Little apprentice sister!" But it wasn't his little apprentice sister.

A thin and tall man stood about a dozen feet away from the cave. Dressed in a green robe, he stood with his back toward the moonlight; a piece of green cloth covered his face, leaving only his eyes showing. Linghu Chong didn't recall ever seeing this man before, so he yelled, "Who are you?" and jumped out of the cave with his sword drawn. The man didn't answer, but raised his right hand and chopped twice toward his front-right, which turned out to be two moves out of the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword Yue Lingshan had used in the day. Linghu Chong was greatly surprised, although by now he had dropped most of his animosity toward the man.

"Are you a senior in our sword school?" he asked, when suddenly a strong wind of energy came upon his face. With no time to think, Linghu Chong slashed out with his sword, but at the meantime, a slight pain came from his left shoulder. It had been hit by the man's hand. It seemed that the man did not use any inner energy when he struck with his hand. In great fear and astonishment, Linghu Chong hurriedly slid a couple of steps toward his left. The man did not follow up, and simply used his hand as a sword, and within moments of time, he had shown the dozens of moves included in those six stances of the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword smoothly with no interruptions. The dozens of moves were executed as if they were all part of one big move. The speed he had shown was simply unthinkable. Under the moonlight, Linghu Chong could see clearly that every move had been used by Yue Lingshan during the day. But how could he have executed all those dozens of moves as if it was just one big move? Linghu Chong's jaw dropped and his body seemed to have frozen. The man flicked his long sleeves and walked off around the back of the cliff.

It was already a good while later when Linghu Chong was finally able to regain himself. "Senior Master! Senior Master!"

he called out loud, but by the time he ran to the backside of the cliff, all he found was the sliverish moonlight reflected by the ground. There was no one to be found.

“Who is he?” Linghu Chong gasped and thought to himself. “When he showed the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword, I would stand no chance flicking away his sword, and every move from him could have chopped my hand off. No, it’s not only my hand. He could have stabbed me anywhere he wants or cut me anywhere he wishes. With those six stances of the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword, I would be like a piece of meat on somebody’s chopping block – be totally at his mercy. It turned out that this sword form is actually so powerful.” He pondered upon it a bit more and then thought, “Apparently the power didn’t come from the sword moves but the way he used his sword. With such a method, I wouldn’t be able to defend myself no matter what kind of ordinary moves he uses. Who is this man? Why is he on top of Mount Huashan?”

He pondered upon the question for a long time but still had no clue. Finally he gave up, thinking that Master and Master-Wife must know about this man, and when little apprentice sister comes up the cliff again tomorrow, he could ask her to inquire about it from Master and Master-Wife.

But Yue Lingshan didn’t come up the next day, nor did she come the third day or the forth day. Only after a total of eighteen days, she finally came up the cliff together with Lu Dayou. Having longed for Yue Lingshan for eighteen days and nights, Linghu Chong had a stomach full of words to tell her, but with Lu Dayou by the side, he simply could not spill them out.

After dinner, knowing Linghu Chong’s feelings, Lu Dayou suggested, “Big apprentice brother, little apprentice sister, since you two haven’t seen each other for many days, why don’t you two have a good chat here. I’ll take the basket down first.”

"Monkey Six, are you trying to run away from me? We came together, so we'll leave together too," Yue Lingshan said with a grin as she stood up.

"Little apprentice sister, I have something to talk to you about," Linghu Chong said.

"Sure. Monkey Six, stop right there. Big apprentice brother has some advice for us," Yue Lingshan said to Lu Dayou.

"It's not about advice." Linghu Chong shook his head. "That 'Sword of the Green Pool' of yours...."

Yue Lingshan cut him short quickly. "I've told Mom that I was being too careless and the sword slipped out of my hand down the valley when I was practicing the Nineteen Stances of Jade Maiden Sword. It's nowhere to be found now. I had a good weep. Mom not only didn't yell at me, but she also comforted me and promised to get me another good blade next time. This really is history now. There's no need to mention it again." She shrugged with a smile on her face.

The more easily she acted, the more disturbed Linghu Chong felt. "After I fulfill my punishment so I can get down the cliff again, I'll find a good blade to repay you." Linghu Chong promised.

"We are apprentice brothers and sisters. Don't worry about the sword. And it did fall into the deep valley because I couldn't hold on to it. It's all because I didn't really master my Kung Fu skills. Who else is there to blame? Let's just 'gi'ton witit'n falla ya'n distini'." Yue Lingshan started giggling.

"What did you say?" Linghu Chong was lost.

"Oh, yeah, you don't know. Little Lin always liked to say 'get on with it and follow your own destiny,' but he's got a heavy accent, so I imitate him to make fun of him. Ha-ha! 'Gi'ton witit'n falla ya'n distini'!"

Linghu Chong squeezed out a dry smile. He suddenly remembered something. "That day when little apprentice sister used the Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword,

why did I pick the Pine-Wind Sword Art of the Qingcheng Sword School as the counter? In my subconscious, did I actually want to counter apprentice brother Lin's Evil-Resisting Sword Art? His entire family and the Fortune Prestige Escort House of his Lin family were completely ruined by the Qingcheng Sword School. Was I intentionally being sarcastic? Why was I so harsh and mean?" Then he thought some more about it. "The other day, in the Jade House of Hengshan Town, I almost got killed from Yu Canghai's palm strike. It was all because of apprentice brother Lin's yelling of 'A senior bullies a junior, how shameless' with disregard of his own safety, Yu Canghai held back the strike. I really owe apprentice brother Lin the big favor of life and death." At that thought, he felt very ashamed of himself as he heaved a long breath out.

"Apprentice brother Lin is very bright and he also works hard. After the last couple of months of training by little apprentice sister, he probably has progressed very rapidly. It's a pity that within the year of my punishment, I can't leave the cliff. Otherwise, because of the favor I owe him, I really should have helped him with his sword training myself." Linghu Chong sighed.

"How did Little Lin do you a favor? How come I have never heard anything about it from him?" Yue Lingshan raised her eyebrows.

"Of course he won't be bragging about it himself." Linghu Chong explained and then told the story about that day at the Jade House.

Yue Lingshan seemed to have lost in her thought for a moment. "No wonder Dad said that he had the character of the chivalry kind, and that's why Dad saved him from the 'Hunchback of the North.' He is so muddle-headed. So he actually came out boldly for you, too, with that loud yell of his." At these words, she couldn't help and giggled some more. "With his little Kung Fu skills, he actually saved the big apprentice brother of Huashan Sword School, and also came

forward for the sake of Huashan Head Master's daughter and whacked the beloved son of the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School. Just with those two achievements, he could have gained a lot of fame in the Martial World. But nobody would have guessed that such a big hero, who likes to defend people against an injustice, ha-ha, Big Hero Lin Pingzhi, has such terrible Kung Fu skills?"

"One can learn Kung Fu skills, but the character of the chivalry type comes when one gets born. And that's what differentiate people's moral standings," Linghu Chong said.

"Dad and Mom said the same thing about Little Lin." Yue Lingshan smiled. "Big apprentice brother, other than the character of chivalry, there's one more thing that both of you have."

"What other thing? Bad temper?" Linghu Chong asked.

"It's the feeling of pride. Both of you are quite proud of yourself," Yue Lingshan answered.

Lu Dayou suddenly cut in the conversation. "Big apprentice brother is the leader of all the apprentice brothers and sisters, it's natural for him to feel the pride. Who the heck does that chap Lin think he is? What makes him think he is worthy to show his pride in the Huashan Sword School?" A tone of hostility toward Lin Pingzhi was clearly shown.

"Monkey Six, when did apprentice brother Lin offend you?" Linghu Chong asked in shock.

"He never offended me. It's just that we apprentice brothers don't like his attitude," Lu Dayou said irritably.

"Sixth apprentice brother, what's the matter with you? Why are you always so hard on Little Lin? He is your junior apprentice brother. As a senior, you should treat him nice and not pick on his mistakes," Yue Lingshan said.

"If he knows his place and behaves himself, I'd have no problem with him, otherwise, I would be the first one to jump on to him." Lu Dayou grunted.

"How did he not know his place and behave himself?" Yue Lingshan challenged.

"He...he...he..." Lu Dayou answered but stopped short.

"What are you trying to say? Why are you hesitating?" Yue Lingshan charged.

"I hope I got it wrong and thought of it in the wrong way," Lu Dayou croaked.

Yue Lingshan blushed slightly and stopped asking. Lu Dayou said that he wanted to go back now, and Yue Lingshan left the cliff together with him.

Seized with gloominess, Linghu Chong stood by the edge of the cliff and gazed at their receding figures until they turned around the shoulder of the pass. Soon, Yue Lingshan's loud and clear singing wafted up the cliff from behind the mountain shoulder. It was a lively and smooth tune. Linghu Chong grew up together with Yue Lingshan and had listened to her singing for many times, but he had never heard of this tune before. Yue Lingshan had always been singing Shanxi<sup>53</sup> folk songs – the kind that had a long ending sound that would be echoing around the valleys. But this one sounded more like water drops dripping down a fountain and each word was short and clear. Linghu Chong tried to listen to the lyrics, but could only hear something like "sisters, let's go uphill to pick tea." She had some odd pronunciations; Linghu Chong could hear the words, but he could only recognize probably the meaning of one out of ten words. He thought, "When did little apprentice sister learn this new song? It is a very pleasant song. I'll have to ask her to sing this one again from the beginning next time when she comes up the cliff."

Suddenly, he almost felt like a hammer had just smashed his chest as he realized, "This is a Fujian<sup>54</sup> folk song. Apprentice brother Lin must have taught her this one!"

That night, Linghu Chong couldn't sleep. Disquieting thoughts surged in his mind. It seemed as if Yue Lingshan's lively but hard to understand singing still echoed around his ears. "Linghu Chong! You've always been so unrestrained and carefree before, but today you can't even put aside your

worry just because of a song. How can you still call yourself a true man?" he kept blaming himself.

Knowing very clearly that he shouldn't be still thinking about it, but the Fujian folk song sang by Yue Lingshan kept wafting around his ears. Linghu Chong felt great pain in his heart. In frustration, he picked up his sword and chopped and slashed toward the rock wall like a mad man. Feeling a stream of inner energy rising from his abdomen, he thrust the sword out, the posture and the way he used his energy happened to be just like the move taught by Madam Yue - Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning. With a piercing sound, the sword surprisingly went into the rock wall all the way to the sword handle.

Linghu Chong was astounded. He knew too well that no matter how quickly he had advanced his Kung Fu skills in the last several months, it would still be impossible for him to jab his sword into the rock wall all the way to the handle. That would require putting superb inner energy onto the sword blade so that the blade could be jabbed into a rock as if the rock was a rotten piece of wood. Even Master or Master-Wife wouldn't have such magical skills. He stood there as if he was in a trance, then he pulled at the sword handle and drew the blade out when he suddenly realized from the feel with his hand: the rock wall was only a very thin layer of rock. It was empty after about two or three inches deep - there was a cave on the other side of the rock wall.

Linghu Chong's mind was now filled with curiosity. He lifted his sword and thrust again. "Clank!" This time the long sword broke in half. It turned out that because he didn't use enough inner energy, the sword couldn't even penetrate a two or three inches thick layer of rock. He spilled out a couple swears and then picked up a big rock from outside the cave. This time he used all his might and threw the rock at the rock wall, which smashed the rock wall hard and produced some vague echoes from behind the rock wall - apparently there was quite some spacious room behind it. He

smashed the rock against the rock wall once again, and this time with a loud bang, the rock went through the rock wall and landed on the floor in the other side. Loud bangs kept rising from the other end as the rock rolled on the floor.

The discovery of such a secret cave drove all his depression and worries completely out. He picked up another rock and started smashing again. Soon, a hole big enough for his head to go through appeared on the rock wall. He widened the hole some more and then climbed in with a lit torch. Inside was a narrow corridor kind of pathway. Suddenly, he broke into a cold sweat as he looked down. A skeleton lay still on the ground facing down right next to his feet. This scene was far from what Linghu Chong had expected.

He calmed himself down a bit and thought, "Could this be a tomb? But why would the skeleton lay on the floor facing down instead of lying facing up? And this narrow corridor doesn't look like a tomb corridor either."

He looked down at the skeleton again. The clothing on the skeleton had rotten into dusts. Two huge axes lay on the ground next to the skeleton, shining as they reflected the light from the torch. He picked one of the axes up. It was very heavy, at least over forty pounds. He raised the axe and chopped it at the rock wall by his side. "Clank!" A big chunk of rock was chopped off. He was stunned.

"This axe is too sharp to be a normal axe. It must have belonged to a senior master in the Martial World as his weapon." The spot where the axe had just chopped by looked very smooth, almost as smooth as a Tofu Cube being cut by a knife, and there were many chop marks on all sides of the corridor. He thought about it for a short moment and was stunned by his conclusion. He walked down the path a bit more with the torch raised high, only finding axe chopping marks all over the cave. He found himself stupefied.

"So the pathway was actually made by chops from this man using his sharp axes. Right, he was taken prisoner in the



middle of the mountain, so he tried to use his sharp axes to dig a way out of the mountain. But he fell short of success and died exhausted with only inches from breaking out. Alas, he was certainly very unfortunate.”

He walked about another one hundred feet and the pathway still did not end. He thought, “That man dug such a long pathway. Such strong will and determination together with his superb Kung Fu level must have been extraordinary.” He couldn’t help but feel great respect toward the mysterious man.

Some steps deeper down the path, two more skeletons appeared, one sitting down leaning against the wall, the other one huddled up and lay on the floor. “So there were actually more than one trapped in the middle of the mountain,” Linghu Cong figured. “But this is an important site of our Huashan Sword School; outsiders shouldn’t be able to have access here. Could all these skeletons be senior masters of our Huashan Sword School who violated school rules and were punished to die here?”

He walked another one hundred feet and followed the pathway when it swerved to the left. Suddenly, a huge cave, spacious enough to hold over a thousand people, appeared right in front of his eyes. There were seven more skeletons in the cave, some sitting down, some lying on the floor. All of them had weapons lying next to them. Among those weapons were a pair of iron plates, a pair of Judge-Pens, an iron staff, a copper club, a weapon that looked like a thunderbolt mace, a fanged tri-tip and double-blade halberd, and also some kind of a weapon that looked like a combination of knife and sword that he had never seen before.

“These people with those special weapons and the one using the axes couldn’t have been apprentices of our sword school,” he told himself.

Not far from where he stood, over a dozen long swords piled on the ground in disorder. He walked by and randomly

picked one up. The sword was shorter than average but the blade had double the width of a regular sword; it was also much heavier. He thought, "This is the kind of sword used by the Taishan Sword School." Among the rest of the swords, some were light and very flexible, which was the type of sword used by the Heng-Shan Sword School. Some had crooked blade and were among one of the three types of swords used by the Hengshan Sword School. Some had very blunt edges and a very sharp tip, which was the type of popular weapon used by some senior masters from the Songshan Sword School. There were also three swords that had the same length and weight of a regular Huashan style sword. More and more questions popped out in his head, "Why is there a pile of weapons from the Five Mountains Sword Alliance?"

Linghu Cong raised the torch high and looked around the walls of the cave. There was a big rock sticking out dozens of feet above the ground from the rock wall on the right side. It looked like a platform. Underneath the big rock, some words were carved onto the rock wall in large fonts, saying "THE FIVE MOUNTAINS SWORD ALLIANCE, YOU SHAMELESS AND DESPICABLE BUNCH, CAN'T WIN IN A FAIR FIGHT, DIRTY TRICKS ARE YOUR SPECIALTY." There were a total of four lines of words and each character was about a foot tall. The strokes went inches into the rock. Obviously they were carved in with a very sharp blade. All the words were written in a bold and tense hand, with strokes extending in all directions. Then he noticed many smaller characters carved next to the huge characters with words like "dirty scoundrel", "ignominious cowards", "filthy pigs", and "incompetent chickens" etc. All of them were cursing or swearing words.

The more Linghu Chong read, the angrier he became. "So all those people were prisoners of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. They were all completely irritated, but had no other way of venting their anger, so had to carve those words onto the rock wall. I'd say what they did was the real shameless

and despicable thing. But I wonder who would they be? If they were enemies of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, then they mustn't be good."

He looked at the rock wall again and saw a line of words that read, "Fan Song and Zhao He defeat Heng-Shan sword art here." Right next to the text, there were many sketches of human forms drawn in pairs, one wielding a sword and the other wielding an axe. After a quick count, Linghu Chong estimated that there were at least five or six hundred of sketch drawings. Apparently the axe wielding one was countering the sword wielding one's sword art forms. By the side of those human form drawings, there was another line of words saying, "Zhang Chengyun and Zhang Chengfeng defeat all Huashan sword art here."

Linghu Chong was furious. "You shameless scoundrels, how wildly presumptuous you are! Huashan style sword art is meticulous and profound. There is very few in the world that can actually block it; who would have dared claiming to be able to not only "defeat", but "defeat all" of the Huashan sword art?" he thought.

He picked up the heavy sword of the Taishan Sword School and smacked it hard against the line of text. With a loud bang and a shower of sparks, he smacked a part of the word "all" off. But from the smacking, he realized that the rock belonged to a very hard type, and even with sharp blades, it would still be very difficult to draw sketches or write on the rock wall.

He looked more closely and saw a drawing by the line of text. The sword wielding man were drawn with only a few simple and crude lines, but from the posture he could tell that it was one of the moves in the basic sword form of the Huashan sword art called Graceful Phoenix. In the move, the sword would be dancing with lithe and graceful movements. The countering human shape was wielding a straight line shaped weapon that could have been either a staff or a

spear, with the tip of the weapon pointing directly at the swordsman's sword tip, looking very clumsy.

Linghu Chong sneered. "The Graceful Phoenix move of Huashan has five additional hidden techniques. How could it ever be defeated by such a clumsy move?"

But when he looked at posture of the man in the drawing again, out of the dullness, there seemed to have more continuous flow in it. Although the move Graceful Phoenix had five additional techniques, but the staff move seemed to faintly have six or seven additional techniques, more than enough to counter the various techniques from the Graceful Phoenix move.

His eyes fixing on the quick drawn human sketch, Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. "This Graceful Phoenix move of our sword school looks like an ordinary move, but the additional techniques hold great power. A smart opponent would have simply blocked it and dodged aside. If he had tried to counter it, he would be suffering great losses. But that staff move in the drawing really can defeat the Graceful Phoenix move of ours. That...that...that...." Gradually, his astonishment transformed into admiration. Deep in his heart, he also felt great terror.

He stared blankly at the two human sketches, lost in thought and time completely forgotten. Suddenly, a great pain came from his right hand and woke him. It turned out to be the torch, which had burned almost to the end and the flame caught his hand. He threw it down, thinking, "It's going to be completely dark if the torch burns down." So he rushed to the front cave, took over a dozen of the pine branches that were meant to be firewood for heating purposes, and then returned to the back cave in a dash.

He lit a pine stick from the about to extinguish torch and gazed at those two human shape sketches again, thinking, "If the staff wielding guy has the same level of Kung Fu as the swordsman from our sword school, then the swordsman might incur some serious injury. If the opponent has slightly

better Kung Fu, then when the two moves clashes, the swordsman will see his own life perishing in front of his own eyes within the time of a flash. That Graceful Phoenix move of ours...has truly been defeated by the staff wielding man and has been rendered useless!"

He turned a little and started studying the second group of drawings and soon recognized that the swordsman was using a Huashan move called Green Pines Welcoming Guests. He immediately felt his spirits buoyed up. When he had learned that move in the old days, it had taken him a full month to be able to execute it proficiently. That move had become one of his favorite killer moves. Feeling excited yet slightly frightened, fearing that this move might be defeated again, he looked at the staff wielding man drawing. But to his surprise, he saw five staves in the man's hand striking toward five different parts of the swordsman's lower body.

"Why does he have five staves?" he pondered.

After looking at the staff wielding man's posture some more he understood it. "These aren't five staves. He is striking out five times quickly in one instant to hit five of the opponent's lower body. But if he's fast, I can be fast too. He might not be able to strike out five times fast enough. So this Green Pines Welcoming Guests can't be defeated after all."

Just when he was feeling great, he suddenly realized, "He is not striking out with his staff five times. He could have struck out in any one of the five positions, and how would I dodge that?"

He picked up one of the Huashan style sword and performed the move Green Pines Welcoming Guests. Then he studied the drawings carefully and imagined in his head how the opponent would have struck out with his staff. He figured that since he already knew where the staff would be striking to, he should be able to figure out a counter. But when that staff struck out from any one of the five positions, his sword would have been fully thrust out with no chance of withdrawing it back in time. Unless the thrust could kill the

opponent, otherwise his lower body would for sure get hit. And the opponent most likely would be a skilled fighter, how could one expect to kill the opponent with one single thrust? And with the sliding posture and a lowered shoulder in the drawing, the enemy for sure would be able to dodge the thrust in that fraction of time. Once the enemy dodged the sword thrust and struck back, he would have no chance to evade. Thus, the unique Huashan move of Green Pines Welcoming Guests had been defeated as well.

Linghu Chong remembered that he had won three times in various fights using that move of Green Pines Welcoming Guests. If his opponents had seen the drawing on the rock wall before, and knew how to counter attack, then it wouldn't matter whether the opponent had used a staff or a spear, he would have either get wounded or get killed. Probably there wouldn't even be a Linghu Chong left in the world today.

The more he thought about it, the more terrified he became. He murmured to himself as cold sweat streamed down his forehead, "That's impossible! That's impossible! If the move Green Pines Welcoming Guests could be defeated this way, how come Master knows nothing about it? Why didn't he ever warn me about it?" He knows all the key aspect of that move from inside out, so he knew to the full extent how detrimental those five staff strikes were. Although those were just five short lines on the rock wall, he could almost feel every strike smacking heavily onto his ankles and shins.

Linghu Chong looked on. The sword moves carved onto the rock wall were all unique moves of the Huashan Sword School, and the opponent always had ultra-clever and vicious moves that would defeat them. The more moves he checked out, the more he gasped, until a move called Boundless Falling Leaves. The enemy's staff move against this one appeared to be very weak and powerless. The entire counter move had taken the defending initiative. Linghu Chong

heaved a long sigh of relieve, thinking, "There's finally one you can't defeat!"

He remembered a scene in January last year. It snowed that day. Countless of snowflakes swirled in the air. Master was in a very good mood. He gathered the apprentices for a sword art lesson. At the end of the lesson, he demonstrated the move Boundless Falling Leaves. His every thrust became even faster than the previous one and every thrust hit a swirling snowflake in the air. Even Master-Wife applauded and cheered, saying, "Apprentice brother, I am convinced from this move that you are qualified to be the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School." Master answered with a smile, "It takes moral integrity, not sheer power to lead the Huashan Sword School. It's not necessary that with just one proficient move, someone would become qualified for the post of Head Master." Master-Wife rebuffed in a grin, "Hey, aren't you ashamed? What moral integrity of yours is better than mine?" Master smiled and did not argue. Master-Wife seldom submitted to other's Kung Fu and loved to compete with Master. Even she had to admit her admiration that time, so it was obvious that the move Boundless Falling Leaves was a superior move. Master explained about the move later. The name of the move came from a poem and the poem had a line saying something like "boundless falling leaves". Master had recited it at the time, but Linghu Chong couldn't remember it. It seemed to be describing how leaves from thousands of trees had fallen and swirled in the air in all directions. That was why this sword move needed to cover all directions.

Looking at the staff wielding human sketch, he found a human shape drawing huddled himself up in a rather unsightly posture that looked as if he had no way of avoiding a good beating. Linghu Chong was about to laugh out loud when his smile suddenly froze. He felt a chill run down his back and the fine hairs on his back almost all stood up. He gazed at the staff in the man's hand on the sketch without

blinking. The more he gazed at it, the more he felt that the staff was at an ingenious position. All the nine thrusts, ten thrusts, eleven thrusts, or twelve thrusts...out of the move Boundless Falling Leaves would inevitably land on the staff. The position of the staff appeared to be dull when one first looked at it, but was actually very clever; the staff move appeared to be very weak, yet it was actually extremely strong. The move really had attained the lofty realm of martial arts that is to “counter motion with standstill and defy cleverness with dullness.”

Instantaneously, he had lost all his confidence in the Kung Fu of his own sword school. All he could think of was that even if he could perfect his sword art so it was as good as his Master's, when he encountered the man with the staff, he would still stand no chance of possibly defending himself. In that case, what good would it do for him to continue learning this style of sword art?

“Is Huashan style sword art really so fragile that it wouldn't even withstand a single blow? Those skeletons must have been decaying in the cave for at least thirty or forty years. How could the Five Mountains Sword Alliance still be dominating the Martial World since then, and no one had ever mentioned that the sword art of any one of the five sword schools could be defeated? Are those drawings just idling theories? Well, it doesn't seem so.”

Although he couldn't tell if the sword arts of the Songshan Sword School and the rest members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance were truly defeated, he knew Huashan style sword art from inside out, and he knew too well that if he had encountered such brilliant moves in a real fight all of a sudden, he would undoubtedly be suffering a crushing defeat.

He stood still, seized in terror, almost as if someone had sealed his acupoints. Endless of thoughts flashed by his mind, and he totally forgot about time.



Time went by, and finally, someone's voice rose. "Big apprentice brother, big apprentice brother, where are you?"

Stunned, Linghu Chong immediately turned and ran through the narrow pathway until he passed through the hole on the rock wall and got back into his own cave compartment. It was Lu Dayou calling out around the cliff. Linghu Chong leapt out of the cave and turned behind a big rock at the back of the cliff. After sitting down cross-legged, he called out, "I am here meditating. Sixth apprentice brother, what's the matter?"

Lu Dayou followed the direction of the sound and came by. "Big apprentice brother! Here you are! I've brought your dinner up for you," he said happily.

Ever since Linghu Chong started studying the moves on the rock wall before dawn, he had totally lost track of time because of his focus on the drawings. It was already in the late afternoon by now. The cave he lived in was specifically used for meditation and contemplation, so Lu Dayou dared not to enter without permission. The cave was a shallow one. Since he didn't see Linghu Chong inside the cave, he started looking around the cliff.

Linghu Chong noticed that Lu Dayou's right cheek was covered with a layer of herbal medicine, with blood still oozing out of the green dressing. Evidently, he was wounded pretty badly. So he asked hurriedly, "Hey, what happened to your face?"

"This morning when I was practicing sword art, I accidentally cut myself. How stupid was I!" Lu Dayou answered.

Seeing more irritation than embarrassment in Lu Dayou's eyes, Linghu Chong figured that there must be something else. "Sixth apprentice brother, how did you really get hurt? Can't I be trusted with the truth?" he asked.

"Big apprentice brother, I don't want to hide the truth from you. I didn't say the truth because I am just afraid that you might get mad," Lu Dayou growled.

“So who cut you?” Linghu Chong inquired. He felt quite surprised. Apprentice brothers in Huashan Sword School had always been getting along comfortably well, and had never got into any fights among each other. Did outside enemies come to Huashan to cause trouble?

Lu Dayou explained. “This morning I sparred with junior apprentice brother Lin. He just learned that move Graceful Phoenix. I wasn’t paying enough attention and got a cut on my face.”

“It’s normal for somebody to make a mistake occasionally when apprentice brothers spar each other. Don’t get mad. Apprentice brother Lin probably just learned that move recently and couldn’t control the move too well. You can’t really blame him. But you probably were a bit too careless. That move Graceful Phoenix is a powerful one. You should have treated it more carefully,” Linghu Chong said.

“That’s right. But how would I know that...that chap Lin have learned the Graceful Phoenix after only several months of apprenticeship? It was after my fifth year in Huashan that Master finally permitted you to teach me that move,” Lu Dayou grumbled.

Linghu Chong was slightly surprised. He thought to himself, “Apprentice brother Lin has only been in Huashan Sword School for several months, and now he has already learned the move Graceful Phoenix. He has progressed too fast. If he didn’t have the brain of a super smart genius, then he wouldn’t have a good foundation. To progress this fast is actually detrimental for his later progress. Why did Master teach him this move so early?”

Lu Dayou continued, “When I saw it all of a sudden, I was shocked, that’s how I got cut by him. Little apprentice sister applauded and cheered by the side. She said, ‘Monkey Six, you can’t even beat my student. How are you going to pose as a hero in front me again?’ That chap Lin knew he was wrong and tried to come by and bind up the wound for me, but I kicked him to the ground. Little apprentice sister

snapped, 'Monkey Six, he is trying to be nice to bind up your wound. Are you shamed into anger because you can't beat him?' Big apprentice brother, it turned out that little apprentice sister secretly taught him that move."

Instantly, Linghu Chong's heart was filled with strong grief. That Graceful Phoenix move was a very difficult one. The five additional techniques had complicated variations, and on top of that, the practitioner also needed to memorize a lot of formulas that went with the techniques. In order to help apprentice brother Lin understand that move, little apprentice sister must have racked her brain out and put in a lot of work. So the reason why she didn't come up the cliff all those days is because she spent the entire time with apprentice brother Lin. Yue Lingshan was the impatient type. She always had a hard time staying still and hated tasks that would require meticulous cares. She always wanted to be better than others. That was why she was able to gather enough patience when she was learning sword arts herself. But if she were teaching someone else, she would never have taught carefully. But now she actually taught that complicated move Graceful Phoenix to Lin Pingzhi. It wouldn't be hard to imagine how much she cared about this junior apprentice brother of hers. Only after a while did he finally managed to calm down.

"Why did you go sparring with apprentice brother Lin?" he asked dryly.

"Yesterday when I said those words to you, little apprentice sister wasn't very happy about it and croaked at me all the way down the cliff. Then early this morning, she dragged me to go sparring with apprentice brother Lin. I didn't think too much about it and thought that it was just a practice. But who would have expected that little apprentice sister secretly taught several unique moves to the chap Lin. I was caught totally off guard and became a prey of their plot."

Linghu Chong understood now: When Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi got into an intimate relationship in those past

days, since Lu Dayou was very close to me, he couldn't take it anymore, so he must have spilled out many satirical comments. Linghu Chong wouldn't be surprised if Lu Dayou had even made trouble and swore at Lin Pingzhi. So he asked.

"You've swore at apprentice brother Lin several times already, haven't you?"

"That dirty shameless sissy. Of course I'd be swearing at him. He got scared of me. Every time I swore at him, he dared not swear back at me and always turned away immediately to avoid me. But I would never have thought...thought that this chap is so vicious. Humph! He can't get anywhere by himself. If it weren't because little apprentice sister was behind him, how could he have wounded me?" Lu Dayou grunted.

Linghu Chong couldn't help but feel a kind of indescribable bitterness in his heart. He suddenly remember the move drawn on the rock wall in the back cave that was created to defeat the move Graceful Phoenix, so he picked up a branch from the ground and was ready to teach that move to Lu Dayou, but then he thought better of it.

"Sixth apprentice brother hates that chap Lin so much right now, once he uses this move, he would almost certainly wound Lin Pingzhi severely. Then when Master and Master-Wife look into the incident, the two of us would be severely punished for sure! I can't do that!" At that thought, he said, "Well, a fall to the pit, a gain in your wit. Just don't get tricked again next time. We are all apprentice brothers. A small loss in a spar practice is really nothing. Why don't you take it easy?"

"Sure. But big apprentice brother, I can take it easy. Can you...you take it easy, too?" Lu Dayou rebuffed.

Linghu Chong knew that he meant Yue Lingshan. A great pain came from his heart, and even his face twitched because of the pain.

"Sorry, I...I shouldn't have said that." As soon as the words came out, Lu Dayou realized how much damage he has done, so he immediately regretted it.

Linghu Chong held tight Lu Dayou's hands and said slowly, "You said it right. How can I not care? But...but...." After a long pause, he said, "Sixth apprentice brother, let's not talk about this anymore."

"Sure!" Lu Dayou replied. "Big apprentice brother, you have taught me that move Graceful Phoenix before. I just didn't pay enough attention and fell into that chap's trap. I'll practice more dedicatedly with all my heart. I have to let that chap know who's better, the one taught by big apprentice brother or the one taught by little apprentice sister."

Linghu Chong let out a sad smile. "The move Graceful Phoenix, alas, it really is nothing," he said.

Lu Dayou could see the sad expression on Linghu Chong's face. He figured that Linghu Chong only got so disheartened because little apprentice sister started to treat him coldly, so he dared not to say another word. After the two finished the meal, Lu Dayou cleared away the bowls and chopsticks and then left.

After a slight rest, Linghu Chong lit a torch and went back to the back cave to study those sword art drawings on the rock wall again. At the beginning, all he could think of was still how Yue Lingshan taught Lin Pingzhi sword arts, so he simply could not concentrate on the drawings on the rock wall. All the human forms in simple sketches seemed to have transformed into Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi, one teaching, the other learning, in a very affectionate way. And no matter which direction he looked at, he could always see the handsome face of Lin Pingzhi flashing in front of his eyes again and again. He heaved a long sigh, thinking, "Apprentice brother Lin is ten times more handsome than I am, and he is much younger than me, only one or two years older than little apprentice sister. Of course it is natural for the two to become close."

Suddenly, a drawing on the rock wall caught his attention. The swordsman in the drawing thrust his sword out, and the way he thrust the sword out and the route of the sword greatly resembled the move of Madam Yue's - Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning. Linghu Chong was astounded. He thought, "This move of Master-Wife clearly was created by her. How come it was carved on the rock wall way ahead of time? How could this have happened?"

He looked at the drawing more closely and then found out that the thrust drawn on the rock wall and the move created by Madam Yue were actually quite different. The sword move on the rock wall was bold and vigorous, simple and unadorned, apparently executed by a man. Once the thrust was out, there was only one thrust, not like how Madam Yue's move had all those extra hidden techniques. But because it was simpler, it was also more swift and fierce. Linghu Chong nodded as he thought to himself, "It's actually not surprising at all. The sword move created by Master-Wife used an idea that matched with earlier people's idea. Since both moves came from the basic theory of the Huashan style sword arts, and the two creators had about the same level of Kung Fu and comprehension, of course the creations would have been alike with only minor differences." Then he realized, "In that case, even Master and Master-Wife didn't know many of the sword moves drawn here. Didn't Master learn the entire set of the advanced sword arts of our Huashan Sword School?" The opponent's staff also thrust out straight with the staff tip aiming right at the sword tip. The staff and the sword made a perfect straight line.

Seeing the straight line made, Linghu Chong cried out loud, "Oh, no!" The torch in his hand fell down to the floor and the cave was instantly covered by complete darkness. He was completely taken by terror and could only murmur, "What do I do? What do I do?"

He could see clearly that since the staff and the sword were in a tit-for-tat fight, and the staff is rigid and solid while the sword being flexible, when the two fighters both thrust out with all their strength, the long sword would have no choice but to break from the middle. In this move, both fighters would have continuous energy flow going together with the thrust, and the staff would be taking the advantage of the situation and keep going forward while the energy on the sword would come right back to haunt the swordsman. There was really no way out of it.

A thought suddenly flashed by his mind, "Is there really no way out of it? I guess not. After the sword breaks in half, and when the opponent's staff jabs by, the swordsman can either drop the broken sword, kneel down with both legs, or he can dive forward to avoid the strike from the staff. But Master and Master-Wife are both well-known sword masters in the Martial World, how could they even consider using such body positions? They would rather die than take on such humiliation. Alas, what a crushing defeat! What a devastating defeat!"

He stood there silently for a good while, and then finally took out the flint stone and lit the torch again. He continued studying the rock wall and saw that the sword moves were getting more and more exquisite and intriguing, especially the last dozens of moves simply fluctuated unpredictably and appeared to be mysterious and profound. But no matter how brilliant each sword move was the opponent's staff would always have an effective way to counter it. At the end of the Huashan sword move drawings, pictures of the swordsman kneeling on the floor in front of the staff wielding man, heading down, sword being thrown away, were carved on the rock wall. Feelings of anger and rage had slipped away from Linghu Chong's mind long ago. All there was left was the deep feeling of despair. Although the picture was totally arrogant and harsh, there was no doubt that Huashan style sword art had been completely defeated by him, and

the swordsman would never be able to compete with him. It was sadly so very true.

That night, he wandered around the back cave back and forth for countless of circles. He had never been hit with such a devastating strike before in his entire life. He kept thinking, "Huashan Sword School is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. It is a world-renowned big sword school with great fame in the Martial World. But the Kung Fu of our sword school is actually so pathetic. Among those sword moves drawn on the rock wall, there were at least over a hundred moves that even Master and Master-Wife didn't know about. Even if I could master the entire most advanced sword moves of the Huashan Sword School, and become way better than my Master, what difference would it make? As long as the opponent knew about the counter moves, even the best and toughest swordsman of Huashan Sword School would still have to throw down his sword and surrender. If he didn't want to surrender, then the only other choice was to commit suicide."

He paced up and down, feeling deeply vexed and frustrated. The torch had extinguished a while back. He lit the torch again. Staring at the kneeling and surrendering human shape sketch, he felt more and more annoyed. Raising his sword high, he wanted to chop at the picture, but right before the tip of the sword touched the rock wall, he held it back, thinking, "A true man is open and aboveboard. A win stays a win and a loss stays a loss. Our Huashan Sword School truly has inferior Kung Fu skills. We really have no excuses." He threw down his sword with a deep sigh.

He went ahead and looked at some other drawings on the rock wall, and not to his surprise, the sword moves of Songshan, Hengshan, Taishan, and Heng-Shan Sword Schools were also completely defeated, and the swordsman sketch always ended up kneeling down to surrender. Linghu Chong had been in Huashan Sword School for a long time and had a good amount of knowledge about many other sword schools.



Although he didn't know the key aspects of the other four member sword schools' sword moves, he had at least heard about the basic ideas behind them. Every one of the sword moves from the other four member sword schools drawn on the rock wall was truly magnificent, but still, the man in the drawing defeated every one of them.

In his heart, other than terror, some unanswered questions also troubled him. "Fan Song, Zhao He, Zhang Chengfeng, Zhang Chengyun. Who are these people? Where did they come from? Why did they work so hard to carve on the rock wall all those moves that can defeat our Five Mountains Sword Alliance's sword arts, yet they themselves were so unknown to the Martial World? And how could our Five Mountains Sword Alliance have still maintained such a great fame today?" He faintly felt that the Five Mountains Sword Alliance had been enjoying a quite undeserved and deceiving fame in the Martial World today, or they were just too fortunate. The thousands of masters and apprentices in the five sword schools were only able to survive in the Martial World because luckily the drawings on the rock wall were unknown to the public.

A thought suddenly popped into his mind, "Why don't I use that sharp axe to chop all those drawings down and leave no trace of it whatsoever, so it would be as if those counter moves had never even existed in the world? Then, for sure, the fame of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance would be saved. I'll just pretend that I've never found this back cave. That's all."

He went in to the narrow pathway, picked up the axe, and came back by the rock wall. But after staring at those exquisite and brilliant moves for a good while, he simply could not raise the axe to chop at the drawings. He stood there and pondered upon the decision back and forth. Finally, he said to himself loudly, "I, Linghu Chong, will never do such shameless and undignified things!"

All of a sudden, he remembered about the masked man in green robe. "That man has such excellent sword skills. He probably had something to do with the drawings in the cave. Who is he? Who is he?"

He stepped back to the front cave and pondered upon the question for half a day, then went back again to the back cave to study the drawings on the rock wall. He went back and forth between the front and the back cave until it was getting late in the day.

Sounds of footsteps came, and it was Yue Lingshan who came with the meal basket in her hand. Linghu Chong was overjoyed. He rushed by the edge of the cliff to greet. "Little apprentice sister!" His voice trembled from joy.

Yue Lingshan didn't answer. She climbed up the cliff and threw the meal basket on to the big rock heavily. Without even looking at Linghu Chong, she turned around and started walking away.

"Little apprentice sister, little apprentice sister, what's the matter?" Linghu Chong called out in despair.

Yue Lingshan gave a snort and then leapt off the cliff onto the path going back. And no matter how Linghu Chong called her again and again, she never answered or even looked back.

With thoughts surging through his mind, Linghu Chong didn't know what to do. He opened the meal basket and found one bowl of rice and two bowls of vegetarian dishes, without the small calabash of wine. He stared at them blankly, lost in thought. For several times he had wanted to start eating, but each time after the first bite, he would feel bitterness in his mouth and totally lose his appetite. He finally gave up, thinking, "If little apprentice sister is mad at me, why did she bring the food up for me herself? If she is not mad at me, why didn't she say a word and didn't even cast a glance at me? Is sixth apprentice brother sick so she had to bring food up? But if sixth apprentice brother can't bring food up, fifth, seventh, eighth apprentice brothers or

any other person can do it. Why did little apprentice sister come by herself?" He pondered hard upon the question and completely forgot about the sword moves on the rock wall in the back cave.

At dusk the next day, Yue Lingshan brought food up again. As same as the day before, she didn't look at Linghu Chong or say anything to him at all. On her way down the cliff, she even started singing Fujian folk songs loudly. Linghu Chong felt like someone was stabbing him hard in the heart. He thought to himself, "So she came to annoy me intentionally."

At dusk the day after, again, Yue Lingshan threw the meal basket on the big rock and immediately turned around and left. Linghu Chong could not hold it any longer and called out, "Little apprentice sister, please stop. I need to talk to you."

"Speak out, please." Yue Lingshan turned around. Her face looked as if it was covered by a layer of frost. There was no trace of a smile at all.

"You...you...you...." Seeing the expression on Yue Lingshan's face, Linghu Chong stammered.

"What about me?" Yue Lingshan demanded.

"I...I...." On normal days, he was the unrestrained and unconventional type, and would have been clever and fluent, but now he was completely lost in words.

"If you don't have anything to say, I am leaving," Yue Lingshan said as she turned around to leave.

Linghu Chong was greatly worried, thinking that once she had left, she wouldn't be back until dusk the next day, and if he couldn't get an answer out of her today, how could he ever endure the anxiety for another night? And judging from the look on her face, maybe she wouldn't even come the next day, and it wouldn't be surprising that she might not come for an entire month. In the moment of desperation, he reached out and grabbed onto her left sleeve.

"Let go of me!" Yue Lingshan snapped, as she pulled back hard. With a tearing sound, the sleeve was tore off completely and half of her left shoulder was exposed. Greatly nettled and embarrassed, Yue Lingshan didn't even know how to place her exposed shoulder and arm. As a martial arts student, Yue Lingshan didn't bother with small matters as much as an average girl, but when a portion of her shoulder and her arm suddenly became exposed, she found herself in a very awkward position.

"How...how dare you!" she yelled.

"Little apprentice sister, sor...sorry, I...I didn't mean to do that." Linghu Chong explained hurriedly.

Yue Lingshan placed her right sleeve on her left shoulder to cover it up. "What exactly are you trying to say?" she ranted.

"I just don't understand," Linghu Chong said, "why are you treating me like this? If I really somehow offended you, little apprentice sister, you...you...can just draw your sword and stab me a dozen times or something, and I'll die with no grievance."

"You are the big apprentice brother, how dare us to offend you, not mentioning stabbing you a dozen times?" Yue Lingshan sneered. "We are your junior apprentice brother and sister. As long as you don't discipline us with punishment, we'd be thanking Heavens already."

"I've been thinking very hard, but I still can't figure out how I offended my apprentice sister," Linghu Chong said.

"You can't figure it out? Didn't you figure out how to have Monkey Six complain to Dad and Mom?" Yue Lingshan said furiously.

"I had Monkey Six complain to Master and Master-Wife? Complain...complain about you?" Linghu Chong asked in great surprise.

"You knew Dad and Mom love me dearly and it would be useless to complain about me. How clever of you to complain

about...complain about...humph! Why are you still pretending? Don't you know what you did?"

It only took Linghu Chong an instant to guess what really happened, but that only brought more bitterness. "Master and Master-Wife found out about Lu Dayou's wound from his sparring with apprentice brother Lin and punished apprentice brother Lin, didn't they?" he asked, but in his heart, he thought, "Because Master and Master-Wife punished apprentice brother Lin, you actually become this mad at me?"

"It was only an accident in a sword spar between apprentice brothers. He didn't do it intentionally. But Dad sided with Monkey Six and gave Little Lin a good scolding, saying that Little Lin didn't have enough skills and shouldn't have learned the kind of moves like Graceful Phoenix. He banned me from teaching him sword skills. Fine, you won! But...but...I...I'll never pay attention to you again! Never ever ever!"

The phrase "never ever ever" was something Yue Lingshan used quite often when she joked with Linghu Chong in normal days. When she had said it before, she would always be casting a sideways glance at him with a big grin on her face. But this time she looked so serious and sincere, and from the way she said it, it seemed as if she really was determined to end her relationship with him.

Linghu Chong took a step forward and said, "Little apprentice sister, I...." He had wanted to say, "I really didn't ask sixth apprentice brother to complain to Master and Master-Wife." But then he thought, "I didn't do it. I have a clear conscience. Why should I beg pity from you?" So after the word "I", he stopped abruptly.

"You what?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"I nothing." Linghu Chong shook his head. "I just thought, even though Master and Master-Wife banned you from teaching apprentice brother Lin sword arts, that's nothing major, why did you get so mad at me?"

Yue Lingshan blushed. "I am mad at you! I am mad at you! You've got ill will in your heart. You figured that since I can't teach apprentice brother Lin sword arts anymore, I would be your company everyday. Humph, I'll never pay attention to you again! Never ever ever!" She stomped her foot on the ground heavily and then stormed off.

This time Linghu Chong dared not to pull her clothes again. With a stomach full of grievance and bitterness, he heard her loud and clear singing the Fujian folk song again. He walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down, only seeing her slim receding figure turning around the shoulder of the peak. Vaguely, he could see her left arm and shoulder still covered by her right sleeve. He became worried.

"I tore her sleeve off. If she runs to Master and Master-Wife to complain, the respectful Master and Master-Wife might think that I was taking liberties with her, then...then... what's going to happen? If this gets spread around, even the bunch of apprentice brothers and sisters would look down on me."

But then he reconsidered, "I wasn't taking liberties with her. What do I care how others would think of it?" But when he thought that she got so mad at him just because she couldn't teach Lin Pingzhi sword skills anymore, he couldn't help but feel great sorrow.

At the beginning, he was still able to comfort himself by thinking, "Little apprentice sister is young and playful. Since I am meditating on the cliff, and there is no one else who would chat with her and play with her, she just wanted apprentice brother Lin, who happened to be about the same age as her, to be her companion. She doesn't have any other thoughts." But then after reconsideration, he thought, "I grew up together with her. That's a much deeper relationship and affection. Apprentice brother Lin has only been on Mount Huashan for several months, but she has treated us so differently, so out of ordinance." At that thought, he felt even more bitterness.

That night, he paced up and down, from the cave to the edge of the cliff, then back from the edge of the cliff to the cave, again and again, for thousands of times, and the same the next day. All he could think of was Yue Lingshan. The drawings on the rock wall in the back cave and that man in the green robe who showed up that night were all completely forgotten from his mind.

At dusk, it was Lu Dayou who brought the food up. He set the food on the rock and filled the bowls with rice. "Big apprentice brother, let's eat," he said.

Linghu Chong merely answered a slight snort as he picked up the bowl and the chopsticks. He placed some food in his mouth but had no appetite whatsoever. After casting a glance down the cliff, he slowly set down his bowl.

"Big apprentice brother, you don't look too good. Are you feeling alright?" Lu Dayou asked.

"It's nothing." Linghu Chong shook his head.

"I picked those mushrooms for you yesterday. Have some and see how they taste?" Lu Dayou suggested.

Not having the heart to go against Lu Dayou's good will, Linghu Chong ate two mushrooms. "Very good," he said. Actually, the mushrooms were quite tasty, but he didn't even notice.

"Big apprentice brother, I've got good news for you!" Lu Dayou said with a grin. "Starting from yesterday, Master and Master-Wife banned Little Lin from learning sword arts with little apprentice sister."

"You couldn't beat apprentice brother Lin in a sword fight, that's why you complained to Master and Master-Wife, didn't you?" Linghu Chong said coldly.

Lu Dayou jumped onto his feet. "Who said that I couldn't beat him? I...I was doing it for...." He suddenly stopped.

Linghu Chong knew very well that even though Lin Pingzhi wounded Lu Dayou with a move of Graceful Phoenix by surprise, Lu Dayou still had been in the school much longer, and Lin Pingzhi would be no match for him. The

reason he complained to Master and Master-Wife was really for Linghu Chong's sake. He suddenly came upon a thought, "So all the apprentice brothers and sisters were pitying me in their hearts. They all know that little apprentice sister is breaking up with me. Only because sixth apprentice brother is close to me, he managed to do something about it. Humph, a true man does not need pity from others!"

All of a sudden, he jumped up like a mad man. Picking up the bowls and the plates, he threw them off the cliff one by one, shouting, "Who asked you to poke around? Who asked you to poke around?"

Lu Dayou was shocked. He had always respected and admired the big apprentice brother, and had no idea that Linghu Chong would be provoked into such an outrage. Flurried, he kept stepping back, murmuring, "Big apprentice brother, big...apprentice brother."

After throwing all the bowls and dishes into the deep valley, Linghu Chong didn't feel any better, so he randomly picked up one rock after another and kept throwing them into the deep valley.

"Big apprentice brother, it's my fault. Why...why don't you give me a beating," Lu Dayou said.

Linghu Chong was just about to throw a rock when he heard Lu Dayou's words. He turned around and asked in a stern voice, "Why is it your fault?"

Lu Dayou took another step back in fear and murmured, "I...I...I don't know!"

Linghu Chong heaved a deep sigh. He threw the rock in his hand far away and then grabbed Lu Dayou's hands. "Sixth apprentice brother, I am sorry. I am just depressed myself. It has nothing to do with you."

Lu Dayou let out a breath of relief. "Let me get down and bring up some food again," he suggested.

"No, don't bother. I don't feel like eating." Linghu Chong shook his head.



Seeing the food in yesterday's meal basket still untouched, Lu Dayou became worried. "Big apprentice brother, you didn't eat yesterday either, did you?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it. I just don't have good appetites these days." Linghu Chong forced out a smile.

Lu Dayou dared not to argue, but the next day when it was still early in the afternoon, he had already brought food up the cliff. He thought, "I've managed to get a big calabash of good wine today together with two delicious dishes. I'll have to get big apprentice brother to eat some more." But after he climbed up the cliff, he found Linghu Chong sleeping on the rock in the cave, looking very wan and sallow.

"Big apprentice brother, see what this is?" Slightly shocked, he said, as he swayed the wine-calabash in front of Linghu Chong. After he opened the lid, the entire cave was soon filled with the wonderful scent of wine.

Linghu Chong took the calabash and drank half of the wine in just one breath. "The wine is not bad!" he praised.

"Let me fill your bowl with rice," Lu Dayou said happily.

"Nah. I don't feel like eating." Linghu Chong objected.

"How about just one bowl?" Lu Dayou suggested, as he filled the bowl full with rice.

Not having the heart to go against Lu Dayou's good will, Linghu Chong had to agree. "Ok, I will eat it after I finish drinking."

But Linghu Chong didn't eat the bowl of rice after all. The next day when Lu Dayou brought food up again, he found the bowl of rice sitting on the rock untouched and Linghu Chong sleeping on the floor. Lu Dayou noticed some redness on Linghu Chong's cheeks, so he reached out and felt Linghu Chong's forehead with his hand. It was burning hot. Linghu Chong must be running a high fever. He became very worried.

"Big apprentice brother, are you feeling sick?" he asked gently.

"Wine, wine! Give me wine!" Linghu Chong mumbled.

Although Lu Dayou brought some wine with him, he didn't give it to him. Instead, he poured a bowl of water and sent it next to Linghu Chong's lips.

Linghu Chong sat up and drank the big bowl of water in one swallow. "Good wine, great wine!" he yelled, and then fell down on his back heavily, still mumbling, "Good wine! Great Wine!"

Knowing that Linghu Chong's illness was quite serious, Lu Dayou was very concerned, but it happened that Master and Master-Wife had some business to take care of and had left Mount Huashan early in the morning. So he ran down the cliff and told Lao Denuo and the other senior apprentice brothers.

Yue Buqun had set up a strict rule that other than the once a day task of bringing food up the cliff, no one would be allowed to go up the cliff to see Linghu Chong. But now since he was seriously ill, to go up the cliff to check on him probably wouldn't be counted as a violation. Yet the bunch of apprentices still dared not to go up the cliff all at once and decided to go up the cliff to check on Linghu Chong in groups and in different days. Lao Denuo and Liang Fa were the first two to go up.

Lu Dayou then went and told Yue Lingshan about it. Yue Lingshan was still quite angry at Linghu Chong, so she said coldly, "Come on, big apprentice brother has excellent inner energy, how could he become ill? You can't fool me."

The illness of Linghu Chong broke with such a tremendous force. For four days and four nights, Linghu Chong stayed in a coma. Lu Dayou begged Yue Lingshan to go up the cliff to pay a visit. He almost knelt down in front of her when she finally realized he was speaking the truth and also got greatly worried. She went up the cliff together with Lu Dayou, only finding a Linghu Chong with deeply sank cheeks and disheveled beard all over his face, nothing even close to the unrestrained and unconventional one he used to be.

With remorse in her heart, Yue Lingshan walked by his side and said gently, "Big apprentice brother, I've come to see you. Don't be mad at me any more, alright?"

Linghu Chong's face looked indifferent. His eyes wide open, he stared at her with a confused look, as if he didn't know who she was at all.

"Big apprentice brother, it's me. Why don't you answer me?" Yue Lingshan said.

Linghu Chong kept staring at her blankly. After a while, he closed his eyes and fell asleep. Till Lu Dayou and Yue Lingshan had left, he still did not wake up.

Only after well over a month, Linghu Chong finally started to recover. During the one month, Yue Lingshan had come to visit him a total of three times. The second time she came, Linghu Chong had already regained his consciousness and was very happy to see her. The third time she came, Linghu Chong had already been able to sit up to eat a couple of the cookies she brought with her. But after that visit, she stopped coming. After Linghu Chong was able to stand up and walk around, he would be waiting by the edge of the cliff most of the day for little apprentice sister's pretty figure to show up, but every time all he could see was either the quiet and empty valley, or the sight of Lu Dayou bending his back to climb up the cliff in a hurry.

# **Chapter 9: Invitation**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Linghu Chong's hand happened to come upon the sheath by his waist, without thinking, he pointed the sheath at Mrs. Yue's long sword in a straight line. "Clank," Mrs. Yue's long sword snapped into the sheath perfectly.**

At dusk one day, Linghu Chong looked down from the cliff as usual and saw two figures coming toward the cliff in great speed. The one in front was in a skirt and obviously was a woman. Both of them had excellent Qing-Gong<sup>55</sup> skills. To them, the steep slope and precipices were just like leveled ground. Linghu Chong stared some more and then realized that they were actually none other than Master and Master-Wife.

"Master, Master-Wife!" in great joy, he called out loudly.

Only a few moments later, Yue Buqun and Madam Yue leapt onto the cliff. Madam Yue had a meal basket in her hand. According to generations of traditional Huashan Sword School rules, when someone was being punished to meditate on the "Cliff of Contemplation," other than bringing food to him, none of his apprentice brothers would be allowed to come up the cliff to chat with him. Even the apprentice student of the one being punished would be restricted from coming up to pay his respect to his Master. Who would have thought that the Yue Buqun couple actually came up the cliff themselves?

Unable to hide his sheer joy, Linghu Chong rushed forward and knelt down, embracing Yue Buqun's legs into his arms.

"Master, Master-Wife, I missed you so much!" he cried out.

Yue Buqun's eyebrows knitted into a straight line. He always knew that this top apprentice of his was forthright and sincere with his feelings and was never strong at self-discipline, which was exactly the major barrier for studying advanced Huashan style Qi-Gong.<sup>56</sup> Before the Yue couple

came up the cliff, they had already inquired about the cause of his illness. Although none of the apprentices had a straightforward answer, from the combined information from everybody's words, they had already figured out that it must have something to do with Yue Lingshan. After checking in details with their daughter and only getting hums and haws as her answer, they came to the same conclusion. Now seeing the revelation of Linghu Chong's true feelings, Yue Buqun could tell that apparently in the last half a year, Linghu Chong had not progressed at all during his stay on the "Cliff of Contemplation". Feeling somewhat displeased, he let out a snort.

Madam Yue reached out and propped Linghu Chong up. Seeing Linghu Chong's thin and pallid face, so different from the face that had glowed with health and radiated vigor on normal days, she couldn't help but pity him.

"Chong, your Master and I just got back from the far northeast and heard that you have been quite ill. Have you recovered yet?" she asked in a soft tone.

"I am all recovered now." Linghu Chong felt a stream of warmth coursing through his body and teardrops starting to emerge in his eyes. "Master, Master-Wife, you two must have had a tiring journey, and as soon as you got back today, you are already coming up...coming up to see me." In great excitement, he choked with sobs and turned his head away to wipe off his tears.

Madam Yue took out a bowl of ginseng soup from the meal basket. "The soup is made with stewed wild ginsengs from the far northeast. It will be very good nourishment for you. Go ahead and drink some," she said.

Realizing that Master and Master-Wife had carried the ginsengs over a very long distance from the far northeast and had thought of letting him take it before everyone else, he was so grateful that when he took the soup from Master-Wife, his hand trembled slightly and spilled a little of the ginseng soup. Madam Yue reached for the bowl so she could

feed him, but Linghu Chong quickly finished the soup in big swallows.

“Many thanks, Master and Master-Wife!” he uttered.

Yue Buqun stretched his arm out and placed his finger on Linghu Chong’s wrist to check on his pulse, but his pulse was slick and speedy, which could only mean that Linghu Chong’s inner energy level actually slipped back quite a bit. Yue Buqun was even more displeased, but he only said dryly, “Yeah, he has recovered.”

After a short while, Yue Buqun asked, “Chong, what did you do during the several months you spent on the ‘Cliff of Contemplation?’ How come your inner energy level not only did not progress, and quite on the contrary, has slipped a lot?”

“Master and Master-Wife, please pardon me!” Linghu Chong said, bowing his head down.

“Chong had fallen ill. He hasn’t fully recovered yet. Of course his inner energy would suffer. Do you actually expect the more severely he had fallen ill, the better his Kung Fu would have become?”

Yue Buqun shook his head and explained, “I wasn’t talking about if he’s healthy or not. I am talking about his mastery of inner energy, which has nothing to do with whether he falls ill or not. Our school’s Qi-Gong is quite different from other schools. As long as one keeps practicing it with devotion, he can progress even in his sleeps, let alone the fact that Chong has been practicing our school’s Qi-Gong for over ten years. He shouldn’t have gotten sick unless he has incurred external wounds. In short...in short, it would still attribute to his not being able to control his emotions and desires.”

Madam Yue knew her husband was right, so she said to Linghu Chong, “Chong, your Master has repeatedly advised you to practice Qi-Gong and sword arts diligently. He punished you to meditate on top of the ‘Cliff of the Contemplation,’ but it isn’t really a punishment. He just



wished that without any outside interference, your Qi-Gong and your sword skills would advance by leaps and bounds within the one-year period. Who would have thought... thought...alas...!"

Linghu Chong felt very embarrassed. "I am sorry. I realize my mistake now. I will practice with all my heart starting from today," he said with his head down.

Yue Buqun spoke again. "There have been more and more turmoil in the Martial World these days. During the last several years, your Master-Wife and I went on many journeys and tried to smooth things up, but the root of the trouble remains and is difficult to get rid of. We believe that in the near future, big disasters are simply inevitable. We were both deeply concerned." He paused for a moment and then continued. "You are the first apprentice of our sword school. Master-Wife and I both have great expectations for you. We hope that one day you'll be able to share some of the responsibilities and tasks with us and gain great fame for our Huashan Sword School. But all you did was to tangle yourself with love affairs, neglecting your existing Kung Fu, not striving to make progress. You have really disappointed us."

Seeing the deeply worried expression on his Master's face, Linghu Chong felt even more frightened and embarrassed. He immediately knelt down. "I...I am so sorry that I disappointed Master and Master-Wife!"

Yue Buqun reached out and propped him up, smiling. "It's good that you realize your mistake. Half a month from now, I will come back to check on your sword skills." Right after those words, he turned around and headed down the cliff.

"Master, there's this...," Linghu Chong called out, wanting to report the drawings in the back cave and the man in the green robe. Yue Buqun waved him off and then walked away.

"You must practice hard and truly master the sword moves. This is something that will affect your entire future

life. You must not take it lightly," Madam Yue urged in a low voice.

"Yes, Master-Wife...", Linghu Chong answered and was about to tell her the sword moves on the rock wall and the man in the green robe. Madam Yue pointed at Yue Buqun's receding figure in a smile and waved her hand. She then turned around and caught up with her husband in big stride.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "Why did Master-Wife say that how I practice sword moves would affect my entire future life and that I must not take it lightly? Why did Master-Wife wait till Master had left and then urged me behind Master's back? Could it be...could it be...?"

A thought suddenly emerged in his head and his heart started thumping heavily while his cheeks burned with embarrassment. He didn't dare to develop that thought, but hope still rose in his heart.

"Is it possible that because Master and Master-Wife know I got ill for little apprentice sister's sake and have decided to betroth little apprentice sister to me? But the criteria is that I must work hard on my Kung Fu skills, and become capable of carrying on Master's legacy in both Qi-Gong and sword arts. Master probably thought that it was inappropriate to speak it out. Master-Wife considers me her own son, that's why she urged me behind his back. Otherwise, what else could have effects on my entire future life?" At that thought, he found himself in high spirit.

He drew his sword and picked a couple of the most advanced sword art forms Master had taught him to practice. But the drawings on the rock wall in the back cave had been so deeply engraved in his mind, regardless of which move he used he would naturally remember the many ways how others could break the move with. In the middle of the form, he withdrew his sword and held it still in the air, thinking, "I didn't get a chance to tell Master and Master-Wife about the drawings on the rock wall in the back cave this time. When they come up the cliff again half a month later, they must be

able to answer my questions and rid my doubts after they study the drawings carefully.”

Even though Madam Yue’s words greatly encouraged him, he didn’t progress much with his practice of Qi-Gong and sword arts during the half-month period. He kept going off into wild flights of fancy everyday.

“If Master and Master-Wife betrothed little apprentice sister to me, I wonder, in her own mind, whether she would agree to it or not. If we can really become husband and wife, would she forget her love to apprentice brother Lin? Well, apprentice brother Lin has only joined our school recently. He was only asking her for her advice on sword arts and sometimes chatting with her so she doesn’t get bored. They don’t really have true love between them. And how could that relationship compare to the relationship between little apprentice sister and I, when we grew up together and spent over ten years together everyday? That day, I almost got killed by Yu Canghai’s palm strike, and thanks to apprentice brother Lin’s interference with his shouting, I barely escaped death. I’d better never forget that and treat him well. If he ever gets into danger, even if I have to risk my own life, I’ll definitely step forward to save him.”

Half a month went by quickly. In an afternoon, the Yue Buqun couple came up the cliff again. Coming together with them were also Shi Daizi, Lu Dayou, and Yue Lingshan. Noticing that the little apprentice sister came together with them, Linghu Chong’s voice trembled when he greeted Master and Master-Wife.

Madam Yue could tell that Linghu Chong had a high morale. His complexion was also completely different compared to half a month ago. She nodded with a smile and said, “Lingshan, go fill the rice bowl for your big apprentice brother. Let him have a full stomach before he demonstrates his sword skills.”

“Yes.” Yue Lingshan answered. She carried the meal basket into the cave and sat it on the big rock. After taking

out the bowls and utensils, she filled a bowl with rice.

"Big apprentice brother, you can eat now!" she said with a smile.

"Many...many thanks!" Linghu Chong replied.

"Why? Do you still have a fever? Why is your voice trembling when you speak?" Yue Lingshan grinned.

"It...it's nothing," Linghu Chong answered as he thought to himself, "If you will always be by my side when I eat for the many days and nights after, I won't be asking for anything else in my entire life." Not in the mood for food at the moment, he quickly finished the bowl of rice.

"Let me fill you another one," Yue Lingshan suggested.

"No, thanks! Master and Master-Wife are still waiting for me outside." Linghu Chong declined.

After Linghu Chong came out of the cave, he found Master and Master-Wife sitting on a big rock abreast. He went in front of them and bowed to salute. He wanted to say something, but then decided that no words would be appropriate. Lu Dayou winked at him with happiness piled upon his face.

"Sixth apprentice brother must have gotten some inside information and is feeling happy for me," Linghu Chong thought.

Yue Buqun had his eyes fixed onto Linghu Chong's face. After a long while he finally said, "Gengming came back from Chang-An<sup>57</sup> yesterday and said that Tian Boguang has just committed several big crimes in Chang-An."

"Tian Boguang has come to Chang-An? He won't be doing anything good for sure." Linghu Chong was surprised.

"Of course not! He burglarized seven families in a single night in the town of Chang-An. I wouldn't have minded that much if he was simply stealing, but he left his handwriting on every family's walls saying, 'Borrowed by Ten Thousand Miles Loner - Tian Boguang'," Yue Buqun exclaimed.

"What?" Linghu Chong uttered a cry. He said angrily, "The town of Chang-An is right next to Mount Huashan. He

obviously left those words to defame our Huashan Sword School. Master, let's...."

"Do what?" Yue Buqun asked.

"Master and Master-Wife are honorable masters, and it's not worthy to dirty your sword for such a low life scoundrel. But my Kung Fu is not good enough to match the villain, besides that I am still being punished and can't go down the cliff to look for him. That gives the villain the freedom to be on a rampage at the foot of Mount Huashan. This is so exasperating!"

"If you do have the confidence to kill that villain, of course I will let you go down the cliff and make amends for your faults with good deeds," Yue Buqun replied. "Go ahead and show us the 'Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning' your Master-Wife taught you. In the last half a year, you probably have grasped sixty to seventy percent of it. Once your Master-Wife gives you some more pointers, you might not lose to the villain Tian."

Linghu Chong was taken by a shock. He thought to himself, "Master-Wife never taught me that move." But after thinking about it a bit more, he understood, "On that day when Master-Wife demonstrated that move, even though she didn't pass it on to me formally, with my training and knowledge in our school's Kung Fu skills, I should have understood the key aspects of the sword move. Master reckoned that during the half year of practicing and polishing, I should have mastered most of it."

He repeated the name "Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning" back and forth in his head, and cold sweats started to emerge on his forehead. When he had first come up the cliff, he did ponder upon the fascinating techniques of that move many times and also practiced it several times. But ever since he discovered the drawings on the rock wall in the back cave, in his heart, he had been convinced with no doubt that each and every sword moves of the Huashan Sword School could be defeated. The move "Unrivaled and

Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning” would especially suffer a crushing defeat. So, naturally, he had lost confidence in the sword move. Several times when the words “That move is useless. Others can break it easily.” came to his tongue, he swallowed them back. He really couldn’t criticize Master-Wife’s highly valued sword move in front of Shi Daizi and Lu Dayou.

“You haven’t mastered that move yet? That’s quite alright. That sword move represents the most advanced techniques and skills of our Huashan style Kung Fu. Your Qi-Gong is not that advanced yet, it’s only natural that you haven’t gotten it right. Give it some time, and you will get there,” noticing the strange expression on Linghu Chong’s face, Yue Buqun commented.

“Chong, don’t you want to thank your Master? He has agreed to teach you the secret formula for the Divine Art of Violet Twilight,” Madam Yue said with a smile.

“Yes! Many thanks to you, respectful Master!” Linghu Chong said in shock and quickly knelt down.

Yue Buqun reached out and stopped Linghu Chong from kneeling down. “Divine Art of Violet Twilight is our school’s most advanced Qi-Gong technique,” he said with a bright smile. “The reason why I didn’t teach you that rashly wasn’t because I wanted to keep it to myself. It was because once someone starts training with this Qi-Gong, he mustn’t have any distracting thoughts and must stay focused on advancing the skills. Any delay in the middle of the training would cause great harm to the practitioner and usually send him into a self-conflicting state. Chong, let me first see how your Kung Fu skills have progressed in the past half a year, then I will decide if I’ll teach you the secret formula for the Divine Art of Violet Twilight.”

Shi Daizi, Lu Dayou, and Yue Lingshan all showed great admiration on their faces when they heard that the big apprentice brother got to learn the Divine Art of Violet Twilight. All three of them knew that the Divine Art of Violet

Twilight had magnificent powers. It was well said, "Nine skills of Huashan, Violet Twilight leads them all." Although they were all aware that among all the apprentices, nobody's Kung Fu skills were even close to Linghu Chong's. There was no doubt that Linghu Chong would get the mantle from the Master and become the Head Master of Huashan Sword School in the future, they still didn't expect Master to teach him the number one skill of Huashan Sword School so soon.

"Big apprentice brother works very hard. Every time when I bring the food up, I always saw big apprentice brother meditating to practice breathing exercises or practicing sword arts," Lu Dayou claimed.

Yue Lingshan threw a sharp, sideways glance at Lu Dayou and made a face to him behind everyone's back, thinking, "You Monkey Six! You are lying to their faces. You just want to help big apprentice brother anyway you can."

"Chong, draw your sword! The three of us will be fighting Tian Boguang soon. We are really making a frantic last-minute effort here. Even though we are sharpening the spear only before going into battle, it is still better than not sharpening it at all." Madam Yue grinned.

"Master-Wife, did you say the three of us are going to be fighting Tian Boguang?" Linghu Chong asked in shock.

"You challenge him in the front, and your Master and I will help you behind the scenes. No matter who kills him, we will all say that you killed him, so our fellow martial people in the Martial World won't say that your Master and I were lowering ourselves to pick a fight with him." Madam Yue explained.

"That's awesome!" Yue Lingshan put her hands together and grinned. "Since Dad and Mom are going to help out behind the scenes, then I'd have the courage to challenge him too! After he's dead, we'll just all say that I am the one who did it. That would be so nice!"

"Are you jealous? You want to enjoy the unearned gain, don't you?" Madam Yue laughed. "Your big apprentice

brother has embraced untold dangers and fought with the fellow Tian Boguang for several hundred rounds. He knows Tian Boguang's actual skills very well. Can you do that with just your little bit of Kung Fu? You are just a little girl. I don't even want to hear the villain's name mentioned out of your mouth, not mentioning having you fight him."

All of a sudden, she thrust her sword at Linghu Chong and the sword tip almost reached Linghu Chong's solar plexus. A second ago, she had been talking to her daughter in smiles, who would have expected that a second later, she had already drawn her long sword and thrust it at Linghu Chong's vital point.

Linghu Chong also reacted very quickly. In an instant, he had drawn his own sword and blocked away the attack. With a loud clanking sound, the two swords clashed in the air and Linghu Chong took a step back with his left foot.

"Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, and swish!" Madam Yue attacked six times continuously.

"Clank, clank, clank, clank, clank, and clank!" Linghu Chong blocked six times.

"Start your counter-attack!" Madam Yue yelled out and suddenly changed her fighting style by raising the sword high and slashing and chopping it down in great speed. Those weren't a part of Huashan style sword arts.

Linghu Chong understood immediately that Master-Wife was performing Tian Boguang's fast knife chops to help him comprehend ways to break them and thus put the enemy to death. Madam Yue's attacks became faster and faster and it was almost impossible to distinguish the connection between each moves.

"Dad, Mom's moves are really fast, but aren't those still sword moves, not knife moves? I am afraid Tian Boguang's knife chops won't be like that," Yue Lingshan said to her father.

"Tian Boguang has outstanding Kung Fu skills. It's not an easy task to imitate his knife chop moves," Yue Buqun



explained with a slight smile. "Your mother is not really imitating his knife arts. She is only focusing on the 'fast' part of it and performing the 'fast' part incisively and vividly. In order to rid Tian Boguang, the key lies not in how to break his knife arts, but in how to restrain the speed of his knife moves. Look at that, perfect timing! Graceful Phoenix!"

Yue Buqun noticed that Linghu Chong had slightly lowered his left shoulder while retracting his right elbow and pointing his left hand fingers to the side, then the move Graceful Phoenix immediately followed. That was the perfect move to use at the exact moment. In immense joy, he shouted out the name of the move. But as soon as the words came out of his mouth, Linghu Chong's thrust appeared weak and crooked. The thrust failed to penetrate the net weaved by Madam Yue's sword.

"What a terrible execution of the move," Yue Buqun heaved a sigh and thought to himself.

Madam Yue showed no mercy whatsoever. With three quick thrusts, she sent Linghu Chong into a frantic rush. Seeing that Linghu Chong had executed every sword move in a flustered way and that none of the moves were well organized, three out of ten moves were actually not Huashan style sword art moves at all, Yue Buqun soon had a ghastly expression on his face.

Although Linghu Chong's sword moves were really disorganized, he managed to block the swift and fierce attacks by Madam Yue. After he retreated next to the rock wall and had no more space to retract to, he gradually started his counter-attack. When a chance suddenly presented itself, he immediately attacked with the move Green Pines Welcoming Guests. His sword tip seemed to have transformed into countless sparks and pelted toward Madam Yue's tempos.

A loud bang exploded as Madam Yue blocked the attack with her sword. She quickly waved her sword in front of herself for protection. Madam Yue knew well that the move

Green Pines Welcoming Guests had several powerful additional techniques. Although Linghu Chong had mastered that move well and would never really hit her with it, it was still a tough move to defend, so she changed into a defending stance from the previous attacking stance and waited in great focus. But who would have thought that Linghu Chong's long sword came in such a slow speed with no strength attached – it didn't even pose a threat.

“Execute your moves attentively. What the heck are you imagining in your head?” Madam Yue yelled and slashed her sword three times. Seeing that Linghu Chong jumped around and dodged those moves, she shouted, “What kind of Green Pines Welcoming Guests was that? Have you returned all your sword training back to your Master because of your illness?”

“Sorry!” Linghu Chong replied as he returned the attack with two of his own thrusts. His face was covered with embarrassment.

Noticing that Master's face look more and more discontented, Shi Daizi and Lu Dayou were both worried. Rustling sounds rose suddenly as Madam Yue began circling around the field. Her green skirt seemed to have transformed into a blurry green shadow. Reflections from her sword glimmered, and because of her great speed, all of her sword moves became indistinct.

Linghu Chong's brain seemed to have become a pool of muddle. All kinds of thoughts flashed by in his head and created chaos. “If I use Galloping Steeds, the opponent can use the brilliant level blocking move to overcome it. If I use the sideways thrust, I'd undoubtedly be getting a terrible wound.” As soon as he thought of a sword move from the Huashan sword art, he couldn't help but remember a move on the rock wall that would break the sword move. The reason why he gave up halfway when he used the moves Graceful Phoenix and Green Pines Welcoming Guests was because he had remembered the different ways that can be

used to break those two moves. He had become very scared, thus instinctively, he would stop half way through the execution and retract into a defending stance.

Madam Yue had used the fast sword moves hoping to lead him into using the “Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning” to beat the opponent and claim victory, but Linghu Chong simply blocked using random moves. He simply wasn’t focused. It appeared as if he was completely terror-stricken and scared out of his wit. She had long known that Linghu Chong had great courage and was the fear-nothing type. She had never seen him fight like this before.

“Don’t you want to use that move?” greatly annoyed, Madam Yue yelled out loudly.

“Yes Ma’am!” Linghu Chong answered as he thrust his sword straightforward. The way he used the technique and the way the sword traveled matched the move created by Madam Yue – Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning – exactly.

“Good!” Madam Yue shouted. She knew this move was an ultimately swift and fierce one, so she dared not to take it head on, but instead, dodged to the side and shot out a back prick.

But meanwhile, Linghu Chong was actually thinking to himself, “This move is not going to work. It’s useless. It will only get me a crushing defeat.”

Suddenly, a tremendous shock came from his wrist and his long sword flew out of his grip into the air. “Ah...!” in astonishment, Linghu Chong burst out a cry.

Wasting no time, Madam Yue immediately thrust her sword straight forth. The force of the thrust sent the blade whistling through the air. It was none other than the move she had created – Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning. But this time, the power of the move was even greater than when she first created the move the other day.

Ever since she created that proud move of hers, she had been pondering over the move every single day about how to

make it faster and how to make it more powerful so that the thrust would guarantee a hit that the enemy would have no chance of dodging or blocking. She was completely outraged when she saw how Linghu Chong executed this proud move of hers – the beginning part looked similar, but half way through, the core part turned out to be completely different. It was almost like someone tried to draw a tiger and ended up with the likeness of a dog. Linghu Chong had acted like a good-for-nothing fellow and had executed an extremely powerful killer move in a wretched and sloppy way. In great rage, she decided to execute the move herself instead.

Although she didn't intend to hurt her apprentice, the move was simply too powerful. Before the tip of the sword even reached the target, the energy coming from the sword had completely enveloped Linghu Chong's entire body.

Yue Buqun could tell that Linghu Chong had no way of dodging or blocking the attack, not mentioning putting together a counter-attack. On the other day when Madam Yue's sword touched Linghu Chong's clothes, she immediately shocked the sword into pieces with her inner energy. But the thrust today had all the energy focused right on the sword tip. In that mode, Madam Yue might not be able to pull it back.

"Oh, no!" Yue Buqun groaned inwardly as he drew the sword by his daughter's waist in a rush and took a step forward. He was ready to jump forth to block Madam Yue's sword if it would reach half a foot further. He and Madam Yue had been fellow apprentice before, so their skill levels weren't that far apart from each other. Even though Yue Buqun was slightly better, since Madam Yue was already half way into her move, he had no certainty of successfully blocking the thrust away. All he could do was to wish inwardly that Linghu Chong would only be slightly wounded.

In the nick of time, Linghu Chong's fingertip happened to touch the sheath hung by his waist. He slightly bent his knees to lower his body and then aimed the sheath straight

at Madam Yue's sword tip. This posture was exactly the same one as the drawing on the rock wall in the back cave – the staff wielding man aimed his staff straight at the opponent's sword tip so the staff and the sword made a perfect straight line; once the two forces collided, the sword would have to break in half. Linghu Chong's head was already in chaos with the many images of the moves drawn on the rock wall flashing back and forth. After his sword was knocked out of his grip, seeing Madam Yue's thunder-like attack heading toward his way, he had no idea how to dodge the attack, so in order to save his own life, he naturally remembered the move drawn on the rock wall without thinking. The attack came in great speed; his counter move also happened in great speed. There was really no time for him to even think much about it, much less looking for a staff. Since his fingertip happened to touch the sheath, he immediately aimed the sheath at the sword in a straight line. Even if his fingertip had happened to touch a block of mud or a straw, he would have used the same move to aim it at the sword in a straight line. Once the move was out, it naturally gathered his strength around his arms, and with a clanking sound, the sword went right into the sheath. It turned out that in panic, Linghu Chong didn't even think about turning the sheath around. As soon as he grabbed onto the sheath, he immediately aimed it at the coming sword tip, and had actually aimed the opening end of the sheath at the sword; that was why Madam Yue's long sword didn't break in half but instead went straight into the sheath.

In great bewilderment, Madam Yue only felt a great pain coming from her palm while her sword being taken out of her grip by Linghu Chong using the sheath. The move Linghu Chong used contained many additional techniques, and by then Linghu Chong had lost control of himself. Almost instinctively, he jabbed the sheath forward toward Madam Yue's throat, and the weapon on its way toward Madam Yue's throat was none other than the handle of her own sword.

Half astonished and half outraged, Yue Buqun waved his long sword and knocked it onto the sheath in Linghu Chong's grip. He used the Divine Art of Violet Twilight with this hit. Linghu Chong only felt a stream of warmth surged through his body and had no choice but to stumble three big steps back until he lost his balance and sat down on the ground heavily. The sheath, together with the sword in it, broke into several pieces before falling to the ground. Right at the instant, in a white flash, the long sword in the air fell with its tip pointing down and went all the way into the ground, leaving only the handle showing above ground. Shi Daizi, Lu Dayou, and Yue Lingshan were simply dazzled by the unexpected scene.

Yue Buqun rushed in front of Linghu Chong. Reaching out with his right hand, he slapped Linghu Chong hard on each of his cheeks.

"You dirty swine! What were you doing?" he yelled in rage.

Linghu Chong felt dizzy and almost fell to the ground. As soon as he regained himself, he knelt down on the ground.

"Master, Master-Wife, please forgive me."

Yue Buqun's anger exploded. "In the last half a year, what contemplation have you been pondering over and what Kung Fu have you been practicing?" he shouted furiously.

"I...I didn't...didn't practice any Kung Fu," Linghu Chong answered in terror.

"Where did you get your wild imagination to create that move against your Master-Wife?" Yue Buqun asked again in a stern voice.

"I...I didn't think. In the urgency, I just happened... happened to use it," Linghu Chong answered haltingly.

Yue Buqun heaved a sigh. "I figured that you just happened to use it without much thinking. That's why I am getting very angry. Do you know that you have gone on to the evil way and might not be able to extricate yourself?"

"Master, would you please explain?" Linghu Chong bowed his head down.

After quite a long while, Madam Yue finally calmed herself down. Seeing Linghu Chong's swollen cheeks in black and purple from her husband's heavy slaps, she couldn't help but feel pity and sorry for him.

"You can get up now! You didn't know the crux of the matter anyway," she said to Linghu Chong.

Turning toward her husband, she said, "Apprentice brother, Chong is a very bright boy. In the past half a year, he trained all by himself and couldn't reach the two of us for any advice. That's probably why he got onto the evil way. But he hasn't gone very far in that evil direction. It's still not too late to correct him and get him back to the righteous way."

Yue Buqun nodded. "Get up now," he said to Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong stood up slowly. Staring at the long sword and the sheath on the ground each broken in three pieces, he was dazzled, having no idea why Master and Master-Wife both said that his training had gone onto the evil way.

"Come over here, all of you." Yue Buqun waved at Shi Daizi and the bunch.

"Yes, Master," Shi Daizi, Lu Dayou, and Yue Lingshan answered in unison and walked by Yue Buqun's side.

"Twenty-five years ago, our Huashan Sword School's Kung Fu used to be in two styles: the righteous style and the evil style," Yue Buqun sat down on a big rock and explained slowly.

Linghu Chong and the rest of the apprentices became very confused, each thinking, "Huashan Sword School Kung Fu is Huashan Sword School Kung Fu. How could there be the distinctively righteous style and the evil style? Why hasn't Master ever mentioned this to us before?"

"Dad," Yue Lingshan interrupted, "the Kung Fu we learned naturally is the righteous style Kung Fu, isn't it?"

“Of course it is! Why would someone go on with his training knowing that he was learning the heterodox style Kung Fu?” Yue Buqun affirmed. “But the heterodox branch claimed that they were the real orthodox branch and called our branch the heterodox branch. Time became the best judge to decide which one is righteous and which one is evil. The heterodox branch eventually vanished like mist and smokes and has been gone for the last twenty-five years.”

“No wonder I had never heard about it before. Dad, since the heterodox branch had been long gone, I guess we don’t have to worry about them anymore,” Yue Lingshan commented.

“What do you know?” Yue Buqun mocked. “The heterodox branch wasn’t really like those evil heterodox clans and cults out there today. They were still using our school’s own Kung Fu skills, but they had a different focus in their training. When I teach you Kung Fu skills, what do I teach you at the very beginning?” He fixed his stare on Linghu Chong’s face.

“You first taught us the formula and techniques on how to control and manipulate our inner energy. We start training with Qi-Gong,” Linghu Chong answered.

“That’s correct. In our Huashan Sword School style Kung Fu, the key lies in the words ‘Inner Energy.’ Once your inner energy is developed with Qi-Gong practices, then regardless of what you use as your weapon, let be your fists and legs, or knives and swords, you will succeed whenever you go. That is the righteous way for training in our school. But among the senior grandmasters of our school, there were a group of people who believed that the key of our school’s Kung Fu lied in the word ‘Sword,’ and that once someone developed his sword skills, even with ordinary level of inner energy, he could still defeat the enemy. The main divergence between the righteous branch and the evil branch lies right here.”

“Dad, I have a comment. Promise me that you won’t get mad at me,” Yue Lingshan interrupted again.



“What comment?” Yue Buqun asked.

“I think in our school’s Kung Fu, no doubt inner energy part is critical, but we can’t overlook sword skills either. If one only has great inner energy, but doesn’t have good sword skills, he still won’t be able to demonstrate the power of our Huashan style Kung Fu,” Yue Lingshan said.

Yue Buqun let out a snort. “Who said that sword skills weren’t important? The main point here is about which drives which. Inner energy is the driving force here after all.”

“Wouldn’t it be nice if both inner energy and sword skills were the driving forces?” Yue Lingshan asked.

“This comment of yours alone is sending you closer to the evil way. When you say both of them are the driving forces, you are really saying that neither of them is the driving force. The old saying said, once the head-rope of a fishing-net is pulled up, all its meshes open. Which is the key link and which is the mesh? We must be very clear about it. In those years when they had the discussion about the righteous style and the evil style, our school had earthshaking changes that turned the entire Huashan Sword School upside down. If you said those words thirty years ago, your head probably wouldn’t be still on your neck longer than half a day.”

“Just because a wrong comment, they’d chop people’s heads off? Wow! Aren’t they too overbearing or what?” Yue Lingshan stuck her tongue out in disbelief.

“When I was still a teenager, the fight between the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch in our Huashan Sword School hadn’t produced a winner,” Yue Buqun explained. “If you had said that comment in public during that period of time, people from the Qi-Branch would want to kill you, and people from the Sword-Branch would want you dead just the same. You said that inner energy and sword skills were as important as each other and both should be the driving forces. The Qi-Branch would of course interpret that as that you were elevating Sword-Branch’s position above them; the Sword-

Branch would think that you mixed up the key line with the meshes and would still blame you for treason and heresy.”

“What’s there to argue about? If they wanted to know who was right and who was wrong, have a contest, then they’d know right away!” Yue Lingshan said.

Yue Buqun heaved a long sigh and said slowly, “Over thirty years ago, our Qi-Branch was the minority. Uncle-Masters in the Sword-Branch were the majority. In addition to that, Sword-Branch Kung Fu skills can be mastered easily and quickly. If everyone trains for ten years, then the Sword-Branch will definitely have the lead. If every one trains for twenty years, then each side would have an equal opportunity to claim victory. Only after twenty years and more training, people trained with Qi-Branch Kung Fu would gradually become better and stronger. After thirty years of training, people trained with Sword-Branch Kung Fu would then be left far behind and never stand a chance to compete again. But that means it takes at least twenty years to actually find out which one is better. You could probably imagine how fierce and intense the fight was during the twenty years or so time period.”

“So at the very end, the Sword-Branch people admitted their mistakes and their failure, didn’t they?” Yue Lingshan asked.

Yue Buqun shook his head silently. After a long while, he finally spoke again.

“They all insisted on their theory stubbornly and never admitted their failure. Even though they suffered a crushing defeat in the big sword contest on the Jade Maiden Peak, most of them ...most of them took their own lives with their own swords. The remaining ones all quietly withdrew from society and lived in solitude and never showed themselves in the Martial World again.”

“Ah!” Linghu Chong, Yue Lingshan and the bunch of apprentices all uttered a cry of astonishment.

“They were all apprentice brothers in the same school. It was just a sword contest. What was that big of a deal? Why did they take it so hard?” Yue Lingshan asked.

“It was concerning the foundation of martial arts theories. It wasn’t just a small matter as apprentice brothers sparring each other,” Yue Buqun said seriously. “In that year when the Five Mountains sword schools fought for the hosting right of the Alliance Chief, our school really had the most talented people with the highest Kung Fu skills. But because of the fierce internal fight in our school, over twenty elite senior masters got killed in that big sword contest on top of Jade Maiden Peak. Sure, the Sword-Branch had a crushing defeat, but many elite fighters in the Qi-Branch lost their lives also. That’s how Songshan Sword School took the Alliance Chief title eventually. The fight between the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch of the Huashan Sword School was really the root of the trouble.”

Linghu Chong and the rest all nodded again and again.

“It’s all right that our school didn’t get to be the host for Alliance Chief. It’s also all right that the Huashan Sword School’s fame was damaged dramatically. But what was not all right was the fact that apprentice brothers in our own school were killing each other ruthlessly because of the internal dissension. Those apprentice brothers used to be like real brothers to each other, but it turned so cruel and brutal, either you kill me or I’ll kill you. When I think about the scenes on Mount Huashan in those years, how everyone felt they could die at any minute, my heart still flutters with fear.” At those words, he cast a glance at Madam Yue.

Madam Yue’s face slightly twitched. She couldn’t help but feel the terror when she remembered many years ago how the elite fighters in Huashan Sword School had slaughtered each other.

Yue Buqun slowly unbuttoned his clothes and exposed his chest as Yue Lingshan shouted in shock.

“Oh my God! Dad, you...you...!”

A two feet long scar lay across his chest from his left shoulder reaching all the way to his right chest. The wound had healed a long time ago, but a pale reddish line still showed clearly. Apparently the wound was so severe that Yue Buqun almost lost his life because of it. Both Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan had grown up by Yue Buqun's side, but neither of them had known about the scar until now.

Yue Buqun explained as he started to button his clothes. "In that day of the big sword contest atop Jade Maiden Peak, an Uncle-Master in our school hit me with a strong sword slash. I fainted immediately. He probably thought I was already dead and paid no more attention to me. If he had conveniently stabbed me again, hmm!"

"Then undoubtedly that you, Father, wouldn't be sitting here today, and who knows where I, Yue Lingshan, would be at?" Yue Lingshan grinned.

Yue Buqun let out a slight smile but his face soon turned solemn again. "This is a big secret of our Huashan Sword School. Don't any of you let it out! Although people from other schools knew that the Huashan Sword School had lost over twenty elite masters in a single day, none of them knew the truth lying behind it. We only claimed to the outside world that a plague suddenly broke out and almost wiped out our entire Huashan Sword School. We should never let others know about this disgraceful event that happened to our school. The reason why I had to tell you all the cause and effect today is because the consequences could be very severe. If Chong followed the current path and went on with his training, then within three years, he would think 'sword skill is more important than inner energy' and get trapped in an extremely dangerous state of mind. That will not only destroy you and the ultimately true orthodox Kung Fu of our Huashan Sword School, earned by many senior masters sacrificing their lives, but also our entire Huashan Sword School."

Cold sweats broke out all over Linghu Chong's body as he listened in. "I've made a terrible mistake. Master and Master-Wife, please punish me heavily," He bowed his head down in shame.

"Well," Yue Buqun said with a sigh, "it is really an unintentional mistake you have made. You are really not to blame. But think about the many Uncle-Masters of the Sword-Branch. They all had good intentions to build great fame for our school using extreme Kung Fu, yet once they went on the wrong way and had gone too far down the road, they simply couldn't extricate themselves any more. If I don't give you a blow and shout right now, with your intelligence and temper, you could easily end up taking the evil route to try to find shortcuts for quick effects."

"Yes, Master!" Linghu Chong answered.

"Chong, how did you think of the earlier move that used the sheath to take away my sword?" Madam Yue asked.

"I only wanted to get out from Master-Wife's extremely powerful attack. Who would have thought...who would have thought...?" Linghu Chong felt so ashamed and embarrassed.

"That's it. By now you probably understand which one is truly superior between Qi-Branch and Sword-Branch. This move of yours is surely a clever one, but as soon as it met with your Master's first-class Qi-Gong, despite of how clever it is, it would be rendered useless. When the two branches had the big sword contest on Jade Maiden Peak that year, elite fighters from the Sword-Branch had dazzling magical moves that were ultimately brilliant, but your Grandmaster relied on his Divine Art of Violet Twilight to counter motion with standstill and defy cleverness with dullness. He was able to defeat over ten elite fighters from the Sword-Branch and affirmed the foundation of our school's orthodox Kung Fu. All of you must take your Master's advice to your heart and ponder over it again and again. The Kung Fu of our school uses inner energy as the foundation and sword skills as the implementation; inner energy is the driving force and sword

skill is the secondary; inner energy is the key line and sword skill is the mesh. If you can't succeed with your inner energy development, despite of how strong you are with your sword skills, it is still useless after all."

Linghu Chong, Shi Daizi, Lu Dayou, and Yue Lingshan all bowed down for the preaching of Madam Yue.

"Chong, I had planned to teach you the entry formula for the Divine Art of Violet Twilight today and then bring you down Mount Huashan to kill the villain Tian Boguang, but we'd better postpone that for now," Yue Buqun said. "During the next two months, you can practice the breathing exercise for Qi-Gong training I taught you before diligently and forget all about those heterodoxy and weird sword moves. I will check on you again later to see if you have any progress." At those words, he suddenly put on a stern tone, "But if you obstinately stick to the wrong course and stay on Sword-Branch's evil route, humph, a harsher punishment would be to take your life, and a lighter punishment would be to destroy all the Kung Fu you have and banish you out of our school once and for all. By then, it would be too late to beg for mercy, and don't you blame me for not explaining everything clearly to you beforehand!"

Cold sweat streamed down Linghu Chong's forehead. "Yes, Master. I would never dare to do so," he said.

"Lingshan," Yue Buqun turned to his daughter, "Dayou and you are both the impetuous type. You two should also remember what I just said to your big apprentice brother."

"Yes, Master!" Lu Dayou answered immediately.

"Sixth apprentice brother and I are impatient, but we are not as smart as big apprentice brother and won't be able to create sword moves of our own. Dad, you can relax," Yue Lingshan argued.

"You won't be able to create sword moves of your own? Didn't you create a sword form called Chong-Ling Sword Art with Chong?" Yue Buqun snorted.

Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan both blushed.

"Sorry Master, we were being mischievous." Linghu Chong asked for forgiveness.

"That was a long, long time ago. I was still a kid by then who didn't know anything and was just playing with big apprentice brother. How did you hear about it?" Yue Lingshan grinned.

"My apprentices wanted to create sword art of their own and start a new style. If I, the Head Master, still had no clue, wouldn't I have become a muddle-head?"

"D-a-a-a-d, you are still making fun of me!" Yue Lingshan pulled onto her father's sleeve and whined.

Linghu Chong, on the other hand, felt a great shock in his heart when he noticed that there was no sign of joking from the Master's tone of voice or the expression on his face.

Yue Buqun stood up. "When someone advanced into the higher level of our school's Kung Fu, even a petal of flower or a leaf could be used as a weapon to injure the enemy. Others might think that the Huashan Sword School is only good at its sword skills. They have really belittled us."

Yue Buqun flicked his left sleeve, and the long sword by Lu Dayou's waist jumped out of the sheath as the stream of energy reached it. He then followed with a flick from his right sleeve. As soon as the sleeve touched the blade, the sword broke in half with a loud cracking sound.

Linghu Chong and the rest of the apprentices were seized by terror while Madam Yue eyed her husband with tremendous admiration and respect.

"Let's go!" Yue Buqun said and walked off the cliff together with Madam Yue. Yue Lingshan, Shi Daizi, and Lu Dayou followed behind them.

Staring at the two broken swords laying still on the ground, Linghu Chong was half stunned and half thrilled. He thought, "It turned out that our school's Kung Fu is really powerful. No one would be able to defeat our sword art regardless of which move Master uses. All those drawings on the rock wall in the back cave claimed that the unique sword

moves of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance were defeatable, yet the Five Mountains Sword Alliance is still able to enjoy great fames in the Martial World today. Hence every sword school has advanced Qi-Gong as the foundation, and once the sword move is executed with vigorous inner energy, it would be difficult to defeat. This is actually a very simple principle, but I had forgot about it when my thoughts were on the wrong track and went to a dead end. With the same move of Graceful Phoenix, how could I treat the one executed by apprentice brother Lin and the one executed by Master as the same? The staff wielding man can defeat apprentice brother Lin's Graceful Phoenix, but he would stand no chance defeating Master's Graceful Phoenix."

Finally able to figure out the answer to his puzzled mind, Linghu Chong ridded himself of all shadows of anxiety. Even though Master didn't teach him the Divine Art of Violet Twilight, nor did he say anything about betrothing Yue Lingshan to marry him, Linghu Chong didn't feel depressed in any way. On the contrary, he was gratified for gaining back his confidence in the Huashan Sword School's Kung Fu. But when he remembered how he had had the wildest fantasy thinking that Master and Master-Wife would betroth their daughter to marry him, he blushed in great embarrassment.

At dusk the next day, Lu Dayou brought food up the cliff.

"Big apprentice brother, Master and Master-Wife left for Northern Shanxi early this morning."

"Northern Shanxi? Why not Chang-An?" Linghu Chong asked with a bit of surprise.

"The chap Tian Boguang committed several more crimes in the town of Yan-An. It turned out that the villain is no longer in Chang-An," Lu Dayou explained.

"Oh!" Linghu Chong replied.

He thought that since Master and Master-Wife had attended the matter personally, Tian Boguang would have no chance of surviving, but deep in his mind, he couldn't help but feel sorry for Tian Boguang.



“For a guy like Tian Boguang, who loves porn and lewd obscenities, and has been committing crimes after crimes against innocent people, even death would not expiate all his sins. He surely has high Kung Fu skills, and in the two fights between the two of us, he acted open and upright and showed the qualities of a true man. What a pity that he chooses to commit evil deeds and thus become a public enemy of the entire Martial World.”

Throughout the next two days, Linghu Chong focused on practicing his Qi-Gong and never went back into the back cave to study the drawings on the rock wall. Whenever thoughts about the drawings came into his mind, he would force them out instantly with no hesitation and tried his best to avoid them. He kept thinking, “Fortunately Master shouted his advice to me in time. Otherwise, I’d be going on the wrong road and become a sinner of our Huashan Sword School. What a close call!”

One day, after dinner, Linghu Chong meditated for a couple of hours when he suddenly heard someone climbing up the cliff. The sounds of footsteps appeared to be swift and agile. It was obvious that the person had great Kung Fu skills. Linghu Chong felt a shock in his heart.

“He’s not someone from our sword school. Why is he coming up the cliff? Could he be the masked man in the green robe?”

He rushed into the back cave and picked up a Huashan sword to hang by his waist before rushing back to the front cave. Only moments later, the person had climbed up the cliff.

“Brother Linghu, your old friend is here to visit you!” the fellow shouted.

The voice sounded very familiar to Linghu Chong and it only took him a short moment before realizing that it was the voice of “Ten Thousand Miles Loner” Tian Boguang.

In astonishment, Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Master and Master-Wife went down Mount Huashan to go

after you, yet you are still so bold to come up Mount Huashan yourself. What do you want here?"

He walked out from the cave and greeted with a smile. "Brother Tian, what a big surprise that you have come such a long way to visit me!"

Tian Boguang carried two large bamboo baskets on a shoulder pole. He sat the bamboo baskets on the ground and then took out a large jar from each of the basket, a big smile on his face.

"I heard that brother Linghu had become a prisoner on top of Mount Huashan, so I figured that he must have been drooling for a good drink of wine, that's why I took two jars of one hundred and thirty year old mellow wine from the cellar of Chang-An Banished Fairy Wine House, so I can drink my fill together with brother Linghu," he said.

Linghu Chong took several steps closer. Sure enough, under the moonlight, the trademark in golden characters on red papers "Banished Fairy Wine House" could be clearly seen glued to the two huge wine-jars. The trademark papers and the seals on the wine-jars appeared to be quite aged. It was obvious that those two wine-jars weren't anything current. He couldn't help but feel delighted.

"Wow, to carry a hundred pound of wine all the way up Mount Huashan, what a big present! Come! Come! Let's have a drink!" His face split into a big smile.

Linghu Chong took two big bowls out from inside the cave. As soon as Tian Boguang opened the seal, the wonderful smell of the mellow wine filled the air. Before he even had a chance to taste it, Linghu Chong already felt tipsy.

"Have a taste! What do you think?" Tian Boguang poured a bowl of wine from the wine-jar.

Linghu Chong took the bowl and drank a big swallow. "This is superb!" he praised and then poured the entire bowl of wine down his throat. Raising his thumb up, he said, "Famous wine! It's really exceptional!"

“I’ve heard that out of all the famous wines, Fen-Wine ranks number one in northern China, and Shao-Wine leads the rest in southern China. Actually the best Fen-Wine is not in Shan-Xi<sup>58</sup> Province but in the town of Chang-An. And in the town of Chang-An, the best one would be none other than the ‘Banished Fairy Wine House’ where Li Taiba<sup>59</sup> used to get drunk all the time many years ago. And in the entire world, other than these two jars of wine, no one will be able to find a third one left,” Tian Boguang grinned.

“Are you saying that they only had these two jars of wine left in the cellar of the Banished Fairy Wine House?” Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

“After I took these two wine-jars, there were still about two hundred jars left in the cellar. I figured that if all those high officials and noble lords in the town of Chang-An, the ordinary and vulgar ones, could go to the Banished Fairy Wine House to enjoy such wonderful wine as long as they have money in their pockets, then how could the Big Hero Linghu of the Huashan Sword School stand out from all the ordinary? Therefore I banged and whammed, and soon the entire cellar was filled with the wonderful smell of wine as the flood of wine went up almost to my waist,” Tian Boguang explained in amusement.

“Are you saying that you actually smashed two hundred or so jars of wine into pieces?” Linghu Chong was half stunned and half amused.

“Wouldn’t it be more valuable if there were only two jars left in the entire world? Ha-ha! Ha-ha!” Tian Boguang burst into loud laughter.

“Thanks! Many thanks!” Linghu Chong drank another bowl. “It is so troublesome for you to carry these two jars of wine all the way from Chang-An to Mount Huashan, brother Tian. Even if they were filled with pure water, I’d owe you a debt of gratitude, anyhow, not mentioning that they were filled with famous wine.”

“You are a good man! A real man!” Tian Boguang praised loudly with his thumbs up.

“Why are you praising me all of a sudden?” Linghu Chong asked.

“I am an infamous evil rapist who commits all kinds of crimes. I’ve severely wounded you before and have also committed several crimes right by the foot of Mount Huashan. Everyone in the Huashan Sword School wished to kill me. But when I carried the wine here today, brother Linghu drank it with complete ease, without ever worrying that I might plant poison in the wine. Only a true man with such breath of mind is worth enjoying such worldly famous wine.”

“Brother Tian, you are making fun of me now. I have fought you twice and knew well that even though brother Tian has very bad conducts, you would disdain to stab anyone on the back. Besides, your Kung Fu skills are way higher than mine. If you want to kill me, all you have to do is to draw your knife and chop down. What’s so difficult about that?” Linghu Chong said.

“Brother Linghu, you said it right!” Tian Boguang laughed some more. “But did you know that I didn’t carry these two jars of wine directly from Chang-An to Mount Huashan? I carried these hundred-pound wine first to Northern Shanxi for two robberies, and then to Eastern Shanxi for another two robberies before I finally came up Mount Huashan.”

Linghu Chong was stunned. He pondered over it and quickly understood. “So brother Tian continuously committed many crimes just to divert my Master and Master-Wife away, so you can come and see me. You’ve used the strategy of luring the enemy away from the base. Brother Tian, after going through all these trouble, what do you exactly want from me?” he said.

“Brother Linghu, why don’t you give it a wild guess?” Tian Boguang suggested with a smile.

“No way!” Linghu Chong rejected. He poured a bowl full of wine and then said, “Brother Tian, you are a guest here at Mount Huashan. I don’t have anything in exchange for your present here on the barren cliff. I am just going to borrow something to make a gift of it. Please enjoy a bowl of number one wine in the world.”

“Thanks!” Tian Boguang answered and poured the bowl of wine down his throat.

Linghu Chong also drank a bowl of wine as accompany. After showing each other the empty bottom of the bowls, the two set the bowls down and broke into a laugh at the same time. All of a sudden, Linghu Chong kicked out with his right leg, and with two loud bangs, the two large wine-jars were kicked down the deep valley. Only after a long while, two muffled smashing sounds came back from the bottom.

“Why did you kick the wine-jars down, brother Linghu?” Tian Boguang asked in shock.

“Tian Boguang,” Linghu Chong answered, “we don’t belong to the same sides of the society. You have committed numerous crimes and harmed many innocent people. Everyone in the Martial World hates your guts. I drank three bowls of wine with you because I think you are someone upright and not some kind of shameless filthy scoundrel. Our relationship stops right here. You’ve brought me two jars of great wine, but even if you put all the precious jewels and treasures right in front me, do you think you can buy Linghu Chong to be your friend?” He yelled as he drew his long sword, “Tian Boguang, let me try your fast knife chop moves one more time!”

Tian Boguang didn’t draw his knife. He shook his head with a slight smile on his face. “Brother Linghu, your respectful school’s sword art is brilliant, but you are still too young and haven’t grasped the depth of it. Right now with your sword skills, you are still no match for me.”

Linghu Chong thought for a second and then nodded in agreement. “What you said is very true. Within the next ten

years, Linghu Chong would stand no chance of ever killing you, brother Tian.” With a loud clanking sound, he sent his long sword back into the sheath.

“Whosoever understands the times is a great man!” Tian Boguang burst into loud laughter.

“Linghu Chong is only a nobody in the Martial World. I suppose you made nothing of hardships to Mount Huashan not for my head on my neck. We are enemies, not friends. No matter what you want me to do, I won’t do it.” Linghu Chong announced.

“But you haven’t even given yourself a chance to hear my proposal yet.” Tian Boguang was amused.

“Precisely!” Linghu Chong said. “No matter what you propose, I won’t agree. Since I can’t beat you in a fight, I’d better lubricate my heels and have the run for it.” Before the word even faded in the air, he had already turned around the corner to the back of the cliff.

Linghu Chong knew well that Tian Boguang could run very fast. That was how he got his nickname “Ten Thousand Miles Loner.” He had good knife skills, but there were plenty of people in the Martial World who could beat him. He had been committing various crimes for the last ten years or so. Yet because he was always on good alert and had first-class Qing-Gong skills, during the several times when the Chivalry Side gathered a good amount of people to hunt him down, no one was even able to touch him. For this reason when Linghu Chong started running, he ran with all his strength.

He thought he was fast, but Tian Boguang was even faster. Only after Linghu Chong dashed out some thirty feet, he already found Tian Boguang blocking the way in front of him. He turned around immediately heading toward the front of the cliff, thinking that he might be able to jump down the cliff to the lower slope, but only after about ten steps, Tian Boguang had caught up with him again and blocked in front of him with his arms stretching out, laughing hectically.

“No chance of running away, I guess we’ll have to pick a fight! Brother Tian, you can’t blame me if I call for help now!” Linghu Chong took three steps back and shouted.

“Well,” Tian Boguang said with a grin, “if your respectful Master can come, then it would be my turn to lubricate my heels and take the run for it. Too bad Mr. and Madam Yue are in Eastern Shanxi right now, which is at least a hundred and fifty miles away from here, and would have no chance of coming back to save you. You do have some apprentice brothers and sisters, but if they come up the cliff, none of them would make a decent opponent. All the guys would lose their lives for nothing, and all the girls...ha-ha, ha-ha.” The tone of his laughter was filled with ill intentions.

Linghu Chong gasped. He thought to himself, “The ‘Cliff of Contemplation’ is far away from the Huashan Sword School’s main hall. Even if I shout with all my might, the apprentice brothers and sisters probably still won’t be able to hear a thing. This fellow is an infamous rapist, what if he bumped into little apprentice sister...oops! That was a close call! Luckily I wasn’t able to run away earlier, or else, Tian Boguang would have gone to the main hall of Huashan Sword School to look for me for sure, and then naturally he would bump into little apprentice sister. If the pretty and lovely little apprentice sister had fallen into the evil rapist’s hands, I...I’d deserve ten-thousand deaths.” He rolled his eyes and quickly made up his mind. “Right now the best thing to do probably is to muddle with him perfunctorily and to stall him for more time. Hence I can’t take him by force, I’ll have to take him by strategy. As long as I can stall him till Master and Master-Wife make it back to Mount Huashan, then everything would be fine.”

“Fine! I can’t win in a fight, nor can I run away, nor can I find any help....” Linghu Chong put his hands out and shrugged, signaling that he had given up and Tian Boguang could do anything as he please.

“Brother Linghu, you must have misunderstood me and thought that I am here to give you trouble. It is actually something that will benefit you in a good deal, and you will definitely thank me sincerely for that later,” Tian Boguang said with a broad smile.

“You have done many evil deeds and gained yourself a notorious reputation. Despite how beneficial this thing you speak about is for me, I, Linghu Chong, will preserve my own purity and never wallow in the mire with you.” Linghu Chong waved him off.

“I am the infamous evil rapist, but brother Linghu is the proud disciple of the number one gentleman in the Martial World – Mr. Yue. Of course you can’t wallow in the mire with me. But if that’s the case today, why not before?” Tian Boguang grinned.

“What do you mean by ‘if that’s the case today, why not before’?” Linghu Chong asked.

“In the Huiyan Wine House of Hengyang, brother Linghu, you and I had the companionship of drinking on the same table,” Tian Boguang claimed.

“Linghu Chong is a big alcoholic. We were just having a couple of drinks together. It was nothing.”

“In the Jade House of Hengshan, brother Linghu, you and I had the same aesthetic pleasure of visiting prostitutes in the same brothel.”

“Bah!” Linghu Chong spit to the ground. “At that time I was severely wounded and had been rescued. I was just recovering in the Jade House temporarily. What has that got anything to do with visiting prostitutes?”

“But in the Jade House, didn’t you have the great pleasure of sleeping with two gorgeous and lovely girls under the same quilt?” Tian Boguang split into a big grin.

Linghu Chong felt a great shock in his heart. He yelled out loud, “Tian Boguang, you’d better watch your mouth! I have a clean reputation, and those two girls are also as pure



as crystal and jade. If you keep spilling out such filthy lies, I won't be so easy on you."

"What good does it do if you don't go easy on me today? If you want to uphold the clean reputation of the Huashan Sword School, you should have treated those two girls with some respect. Why did you get under the same quilt with those two girls and rubbed up and down in front of all those heroes of the Qingcheng Sword School, Hengshan Sword School, and Heng-Shan Sword School, stopping at nothing? Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

Infuriated, Linghu Chong threw a fist at him fiercely, which Tian Boguang easily dodged with a big grin.

"It's no good trying to deny it! If you hadn't gotten petty advantages of those two little girls on the bed under the quilt, why would they all get lovesickness for you today?"

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "This man is a shameless rascal. It is possible that anything would come out of his mouth. If I tangle myself with him in such an inexplicable way, who knows what more garbage is going to come out of his mouth? That day in Huiyan Wine House of Hengyang, he fell for my trick. That was the most galling shame and humiliation he has ever had in his entire life. It's the only thing I can use to shut him up." At that thought, instead of getting outraged, he smiled.

"I was wondering why did brother Tian come such a long distance to Mount Huashan. Who would have thought that your Master, the little nun Yilin, had sent you to bring two jars of great wine to me, thanking me for finding her such a well-behaved apprentice? Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

Tian Boguang flushed, but soon calmed down. "The two jars of wine are tokens of my own regard. But my coming to Mount Huashan surely is related to Little Sister Yilin," putting on a serious face, he said.

"Little Sister? No, no, no! Isn't she your Master now? What a true man says cannot be unsaid. Are you trying to go back on your own words? Apprentice sister Yilin is an

outstanding apprentice from a famous school. It was really your good fortune to have found such a Master. Ha-ha!”

Tian Boguang was outraged. He grabbed onto his knife handle and almost drew the knife. But he pulled himself together and spoke coldly.

“Brother Linghu, you don’t have good Kung Fu with your hands, but you surely have outstanding Kung Fu with your tongue.”

“Since I am no match for you in a fight with sword, knife, punches, or kicks, all I can do is to take some petty advantage from you with my tongue, brother Tian.” Linghu Chong grinned.

“In the fight with the tongue, I candidly admit my defeat. Brother Linghu, it’s time for you to come with me now,” Tian Boguang demanded.

“No way! I am not going even if I have to die!” Linghu Chong declared.

“Do you know where I am asking you to go to?” Tian Boguang asked.

“I don’t know and I don’t care. Either to go up the heavens or go down to hell, wherever Tian Boguang goes, Linghu Chong won’t go.”

Tian Boguang shook his head slowly. “Brother Linghu, I am here to invite you to pay a visit to Little Sister Yilin,” he said.

“You rascal, has apprentice sister Yilin fallen into your hands again? How dare you offend your superior and be so disrespectful to your own Master?” Linghu Chong was shocked.

Tian Boguang yelled angrily, “My Master is someone else. He had passed away many years ago. Don’t you ever mix up Little Sister Yilin in this matter again.” He paused for a moment to calm himself down and then said, “Brother Linghu, Little Sister Yilin misses you very much. She thinks of you days and nights. I consider you a friend, that’s why I will

never dare to be disrespectful to her again. You can relax. Shall we go now?"

"I am not going! How many times do I have to repeat myself, one thousand times, ten thousand times?" Linghu Chong claimed.

Tian Boguang showed a slight smile but didn't say a word.

"What are you smiling about? Because your Kung Fu is better than mine, you think you'll just force your will upon me and take me down as a prisoner?" Linghu Chong mocked.

"I have no hostility toward you, brother Linghu, and really don't want to offend you in anyway. But I surely don't want to set out in high spirits and return disappointed."

"Tian Boguang, you have excellent knife skills, and it would be a piece of cake for you to kill me or wound me. You can kill Linghu Chong, but you won't succeed in humiliating Linghu Chong. At most, I'll just let you take away my life, but to take me prisoner so you can take me down Mount Huashan, that's absolutely impossible!"

"I am just doing a favor for someone inviting you to pay a visit to Little Sister Yilin. That's the true and only intention. Why are you so uptight?" Tian Boguang turned his head and eyed Linghu Chong from the corner of his eyes.

"If it's something I don't want to do, even my Master, Master-Wife, Five Mountains Sword Alliance Chief, or the Emperor himself won't be able to force me, not mentioning you. Here's my final answer: I am not going! Even if I have to say it ten thousand times or one hundred thousand times, the answer is still the same," Linghu Chong said with determination.

"You are too stubborn. I am afraid I'll have to give offense now." With a loud clank, Tian Boguang drew his knife.

"You have offended me at the very beginning when you planned to take me prisoner," Linghu Chong rebuffed angrily. "I guess the 'Cliff of Contemplation' on top of Mount Huashan

is going to be the place where I depart this life." He let out a clear roar and also drew his sword.

Tian Boguang took a step back and slightly frowned. "Brother Linghu, we have neither scores to settle nor grudges between the two of us. Why do we have to fight in the expense of our lives? Why don't we have a bet?"

Linghu Chong secretly felt pleased. He thought to himself, "A bet? That's perfect! If I lose, I can still argue my way out, even if I have to use some lame excuses." But instead, he said, "What bet? If I win, I won't go, and if I lose, I won't go just the same."

"I see," Tian Boguang said with a smile. "The head apprentice of the Huashan Sword School is so scared of Tian Boguang's fast knife chops, he doesn't even have the guts to take on thirty knife moves of mine."

"What am I scared of? What's the worst, me dying under your blade? So what?" Linghu Chong mocked angrily.

"Brother Linghu, it's not that I look down upon you or anything, but I am afraid that you won't be able to fend off even thirty moves of my fast knife chops. As soon as you fend off thirty moves of my fast knife chops, I'll turn my butt around and get out of here right away. No more babbling. But if I get lucky and beat you within thirty moves, you'll have to go down Mount Huashan with me and pay a visit to Little Sister Yilin," Tian Boguang declared.

In the instant, Linghu Chong had gone through Tian Boguang's knife moves once in his head. He thought, "After the last two fights with him, I've pondered over all the powerful techniques of his fast knife chops many times. And on top of that, I've also asked Master and Master-Wife about them. If all I need to do is to guard myself so I don't lose, couldn't I even fend off thirty moves of his?"

"Fine, I'll see your thirty moves!" Linghu Chong yelled as he thrust his sword toward Tian Boguang. He had used an advanced move of the Huashan sword art called Graceful Phoenix right at the beginning. The blade of his sword

vibrated and made a buzzing sound as rays of reflection covered Tian Boguang's entire upper body.

"Nice sword move!" Tian Boguang praised as he blocked it with his knife and took a step back.

"That's one!" Linghu Chong shouted out and immediately followed with another attack - Green Pines Welcoming Guest.

"Another nice one!" Tian Boguang praised again.

He knew that there must be numerous additional techniques hidden in the move, so he dared not to fend it off with his knife and simply dodged to the side in a slide. The dodge shouldn't really be counted as a move, but Linghu Chong immediately shouted.

"That's two!"

Before the words even faded, he had already started another attacking move. Soon, Linghu Chong had already launched five attacking moves continuously. Tian Boguang either blocked them or dodged them, never starting his counter-attack, yet Linghu Chong had already counted up to number five. When Linghu Chong started his sixth move by thrusting his sword upward from a lower angle, Tian Boguang gave a loud roar and brought his knife swishing down through the air. The knife and the sword clashed in the midair and Linghu Chong's long sword was knocked down instantly.

"Sixth move, seventh move, eighth move, ninth move, tenth move!" Tian Boguang yelled out.

Every time when he counted one, he would throw a chop at the same time. He counted five moves, and he chopped five times. Every chop swished straight down through the air; he didn't even change his move at all. Each chop landed heavier than the previous one. When the sixth chop came down, Linghu Chong felt that his entire body had been trapped in the energy stream from the blade slicing down and he couldn't even breathe, but he gathered all the strength he could and blocked upwards anyway. With a loud

clank, the knife and the sword smashed into each other. Linghu Chong's arm instantly went numb and the long sword fell from his hand and landed on the ground. Tian Boguang threw another chop. Linghu Chong simply closed his eyes and ignored it.

"How many moves now?" Tian Boguang asked, laughing loudly.

Linghu Chong opened his eyes and answered, "Not only your knife skills are better than mine, your arm strength and inner energy are also way better than mine. Linghu Chong is no match for you."

"Then let's go!" Tian Boguang smiled in triumph.

"Nope. I am not going!" Linghu Chong shook his head again.

"Brother Linghu, I consider you a true man who keeps his own promises. You have lost within thirty moves. Why are you going back on your words?" Tian Boguang pulled a long face.

"At first, I didn't believe that you can beat me within thirty moves. Sure, I have lost, but I never said that I would go with you if I lose to you, did I?" Linghu Chong argued.

Tian Boguang thought that it was really he himself who had said that and Linghu Chong surely never said anything close, so he placed his knife across in front of him and said with a sneer, "There's a character 'Hu' in your name and the name sure fits the person.<sup>60</sup> Ok, you didn't say it, so what?"

"When I lost to you earlier, it was only because you had more strength than me. I am not giving in yet. Let me take a rest, then we can try it again," Linghu Chong said.

"Fine. I'll wait till you admit your loss, yourself." Tian Boguang sat on a rock with his hands on his hips and looked at Linghu Chong with a big smile.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "This villain is insisting on having me leave Mount Huashan. I wonder what kind of evil plan he has. The real reason must have nothing to do with paying a visit to apprentice sister Yilin. He isn't a real student of apprentice sister Yilin, and apprentice sister Yilin

would be scared out of her wit as soon as she sees him, how could she ever maintain contacts with him? But he keeps pestering me at the moment. How can I get out of it?"

He remembered the six chops from Tian Boguang just a minute ago. Those chops had no special techniques to go with them yet the power of the chops was tremendous, and he really had no idea how to fend them off. He suddenly got an idea.

"That night when Great Mr. Mo killed Great Songyang Palm Fei Bin in the remote valley, Great Mr. Mo used the flashy and unpredictable Hengshan style sword art. If I use that to fight Tian Boguang, I am sure I won't lose. There are many deadly moves amount the Hengshan style sword art drawn on the rock wall in the back cave. If I go back there and learn some thirty or forty moves, I should be able to put up a decent fight with Tian Boguang." But then he thought, "Hengshan style sword art is a fine and ingenious sword art. How can I master it in such a short time? Alas, that was just my wishful thinking."

Seeing the fast changing expression on Linghu Chong's face, in one minute being happy, but in the next minute looking totally worried, Tian Boguang grinned.

"Brother Linghu, have you thought of a CUNNING TRICK to defeat my knife moves?"

Hearing that Tian Boguang raising his voice specifically at the words "cunning trick", Linghu Chong's anger rose. "There's no need for any CUNNING TRICKS just to defeat your knife moves. You are being really wordy and annoying here. I can't think well when you keep distracting me like that. I am going to go inside the cave now to think it through. Don't you come and disturb me."

"Fine! You go ahead and think REAL HARD. I won't disturb you." Tian Boguang agreed.

Linghu Chong noticed that Tian raised his voice again at the words "real hard." He cursed in a whisper to himself and entered the cave. He lit a candle and then climbed back into

the back cave. Wasting no time, he went straight to the side of the rock wall with drawings of Hengshan style sword art. Seeing all the different forms of magical and profound sword moves with endless variations, he was dumbfounded. If he hadn't seen them with his own eyes, he would never have believed that such brilliant and fluctuating moves actually existed in the world.

"In such a short time, it's simply impossible for me to learn the sword art well. I'd better pick several of the most unpredictable and weird variation techniques and memorize them well. When I go out again, I'll use them with no specific order whatsoever and fight indiscreetly. Who knows? I might be able to make a surprise attack on him," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

Once decided, he immediately started reading and memorizing. Even though the other figure in the drawings had already defeated every move of the Hengshan sword art, thinking that Tian Boguang would have no chance of knowing any of those techniques, he wasn't worried at all.

He worked on memorizing all the techniques while trying them out with his hands, and after he had learned about twenty or so moves, an hour had already passed. Tian Boguang's voice rose from outside the cave.

"Brother Linghu, if you don't come out, I am going to charge in now."

Linghu Chong leapt out with his sword in his hand and shouted, "Fine! Let me take another thirty moves of yours!"

"So brother Linghu, what if you lose again this time?" Tian Boguang asked with a beam.

"At least it wouldn't be the first loss for me. Just one more loss, no big deal!"

Before he even finished talking, he had already launched a storm of attacks with seven continuous moves. All those seven moves were ones he had newly learned from the rock wall in the back cave, and all of them were fluctuating and unpredictable to the extreme.



Tian Boguang had not expected such unpredictable variations from Huashan style sword art. Caught in a surprise, he had to take one step back after another. When it was the tenth move, still being greatly amazed, he roared loudly and waved his knife to start his counter attack. He had great strength with his knife chops, which prevented Linghu Chong from executing many of the variations in his sword moves. At the nineteenth move, the two weapons clashed, and Linghu Chong's long sword was once again knocked out of his grip.

Linghu Chong leapt two steps to the side and shouted, "Brother Tian, you only have stronger arms than me. You didn't win with your knife moves. I am still not convinced this time. Let me figure out another thirty sword moves and then I'll fight you again."

"Your Master is still a hundred and fifty miles away at this very moment, searching for traces of me. He probably won't make it back to Mount Huashan for another ten to fifteen days. This delaying strategy of yours is not gonna work," Tian Boguang said with a smirk.

"Who said that I have to rely on my Master to take care of you? I just recovered from my illness and am very weak in my strength, that's how you got the advantage. If we are only comparing our moves, you think I can't even block thirty moves of yours? I don't think so!"

"I am not going to fall for you again. Either I win by knife moves or by arm strength, a win is a win and a loss is a loss. What good does it do to find all the excuses?" Tian Boguang disagreed.

"Fine! You wait for me here. Be a true man. Don't you get scared and decide to run away. But if you do, I won't be chasing after you!" Linghu Chong said.

Tian Boguang burst into loud laughter. He took two steps back and sat on a big rock.

Linghu Chong went back into the back cave. He figured, "Tian Boguang has fought Priest Tian-Song of the Taishan Sword School before, and also wounded him quite good. He

has also fought with apprentice sister Yilin of the Heng-Shan Sword School. And I just fought him using the Hengshan style sword art. He probably doesn't know anything about the Songshan style sword art."

He found the drawings of the Songshan Sword School's sword moves and learned about ten moves or so. "I still have over ten Hengshan style lethal moves that I didn't have a chance to use earlier," he thought to himself. "If I mix them up in Songshan style sword art moves and then use several moves of my own sword school all of a sudden, I might be able to really confuse the hell out of him."

He didn't even wait for Tian Boguang to call for him, and rushed straight into the fight as soon as he went out of the cave. The sword moves he used would be a minute in Songshan style, the next minute in Hengshan style, with Huashan style deadly moves mixed up in between.

"Weird! This is so weird!" Tian Boguang kept yelling out loud. But on the twenty-second move, he was still able to place the blade of his knife right next to Linghu Chong's neck and forced him to throw down his sword.

"In the first time, I was only able to take on five moves of yours. But after I thought about it for a little while, I was able to take on eighteen moves of yours. After thinking for another while, I was already able to take on twenty-one moves of yours. Brother Tian, aren't you a bit scared by now?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Why should I be scared?" Tian Boguang beamed.

"If I keep pondering over it and think a couple more times, I will then be able to take on thirty of your moves. And after thinking some more, I will be able to turn the tide and claim victory. Even if I decide to not kill you, wouldn't it be terrible for you?" Linghu Chong deduced.

"I have been wandering around the Martial World for many years, and brother Linghu, you are certainly the smartest one out of all the adversaries I ever had. It's a pity that your Kung Fu is still a good deal far too lower than mine.

Say that you can progress really fast, but it would still be impossible for you to defeat me within hours.” Tian Boguang claimed.

“Brother Tian, you are certainly the most reckless one out of all the adversaries I ever had. Seeing that Linghu Chong is getting stronger and stronger in the fights, yet you still decide not to run away. It’s so rare. Brother Tian, if you’ll excuse me, I am going to go inside to think a bit more.”

“Help yourself!” Tian Boguang only grinned.

Linghu Chong walked in the cave slowly. Although he had been raving with Tian Boguang as if he had nothing to worry about, in his heart, he was actually getting more and more worried. “This villain must have come to Mount Huashan with evil plans. He knows very well that Master and Master-Wife went after him in the hope to get rid of him, why would he still have leisure time to have the contests with me? After he took me prisoner each time, even if he doesn’t want to kill me, he should at least have sealed my acupoints to restrict me from moving about. Why did he let me go free again and again? What does he want?”

He was determined that Tian Boguang must have come to Mount Huashan with a terrifying evil plot, but he had no clue what the plot might be. “Could it be that he wanted to keep me here so somebody else can take care of all my apprentice brothers and sisters? But why doesn’t he simply kill me right away? Wouldn’t that be a lot easier?” he couldn’t help but ask himself.

He thought for quite a while and finally jumped up onto his feet, thinking, “No matter what, it appears that our Huashan Sword School is in great danger today. Master and Master-Wife are not home, and I am the head of the sword school right now. I’ll have to carry the heavy burden all by myself. Despite whatever Tian Boguang’s purpose is, I must use all my brain to keep pestering him, and if there’s ever an opportunity that I can take advantage of him, I should kill him without hesitation.”

After making up his mind, he went on studying the drawings on the rock wall, but this time he intentionally picked the fiercest and most vicious and fatal moves to memorize. By the time he walked out of the cave, it was daybreak the next day already. Although Linghu Chong had the intent to kill, his face looked very relaxed.

"Brother Tian, you have come to Mount Huashan as a guest, and I am so sorry that I haven't really fulfilled my duty as a host. After this contest, regardless of who wins and who loses, I'll invite you to try out some of our local products," Linghu Chong suggested.

"Thanks a lot!" Tian Boguang smiled.

"But when we meet again down Mount Huashan in the future, we would still be fighting for our lives. Nothing will be like today's polite contest with counted moves ever again," Linghu Chong declared.

"It would be a real pity to kill the kind of friend like you, brother Linghu. But if I don't kill you, your Kung Fu would progress too fast and one day when your skills are better than mine, you probably wouldn't let me, the evil rapist, go easily," Tian Boguang said.

"Precisely. It is such a rare opportunity for us to swap pointers in Kung Fu like today. Brother Tian, I am going to attack now. Will you please give me some advice?"

"You flatter me! Brother Linghu, please!" Tian Boguang said courteously.

"The more I think about it, the more I feel that I am no match for you, brother Tian," Linghu Chong said with a big smile.

Before he even finished the sentence, he had already thrust his sword forward. By the time his sword tip was about three feet from Tian Boguang's body, the sword went toward the left side and then turned into a sudden side stab. Tian Boguang raised his knife and blocked. Not waiting for the sword blade to clash with the knife blade, Linghu Chong suddenly slashed up from Tian's crouch. This move was both

sinister and fierce to the extreme. Tian Boguang was astounded and immediately jumped back. Linghu Chong followed the initiative and thrust out three attacks, each one heading toward Tian Boguang's vital parts with all his might. Losing the initiative, Tian Boguang found himself in disadvantage and had to block left and right with his knife. A tearing sound rose as Linghu Chong's long sword penetrated his pants right next to his right leg, leaving a hole in his pants. The fast sword thrust landed only a mere inch from his leg.

Tian Boguang threw a punch with his right fist, which knocked Linghu Chong rolling on the ground. "Every move of yours is aimed at killing me. What kind of swapping pointers is that?" he yelled in rage.

"Well, no matter how hard I try, I still wouldn't stand a chance even harming a hair of yours. You surely have a lot of strength with your left fist." Linghu Chong leapt back onto his feet.

"Sorry for that!" Tian Boguang said.

"I think you broke two of my ribs." Linghu Chong stepped forward with a big smile on his face.

As he got closer, all of a sudden, he passed the sword to his left hand and thrust it out backward in a flash. This unimaginably queer move turned out to be a deadly move of the Heng-Shan Sword School. In immense astonishment, Tian Boguang found the sword tip only inches from his lower stomach. In a great hurry he rolled onto the ground and was able to barely dodge it. Occupying the commanding position, Linghu Chong continued with four more thrusts, which put Tian Boguang in an extremely awkward position. It almost looked as if within a couple more moves, Linghu Chong would succeed nailing Tian on the ground with his sword. But unexpectedly, Tian Boguang threw a kick with his left foot all of a sudden, which landed on Linghu Chong's wrist. He then instantly followed with another kick, his right foot striking Linghu Chong's stomach heavily. Linghu Chong could no

longer hold on to his sword. The sword flew out of his grip as he fell down to the ground facing up. Tian Boguang leapt up and rushed forward, placing his blade right on Linghu Chong's throat.

"Very sinister sword moves indeed! I almost got killed. Are you convinced yet?" Tian Boguang sneered.

"Of course not! We agreed to a contest between my sword moves and your knife chops. Didn't you just use your fists and legs to throw punches and kicks at me? How should we count the moves now?"

"Even if we count the punches and kicks, it is still less than thirty moves." Tian Boguang moved his blade away and said with a sneer.

Linghu Chong stood up and said angrily, "You beat me within thirty moves. You have excellent Kung Fu. So what? If you want to kill me, then kill me, why are you laughing at me? If you want to laugh, then laugh. Why are you sneering?"

Tian Boguang took a step back. "Brother Linghu, you have a good accusation. Yes, I am wrong." He cupped his hands and said, "I apologize sincerely. Will you, brother Linghu, please forgive me?"

Linghu Chong was struck dumb. Tian Boguang just had a brilliant victory, yet he was willing to apologize. That's far from what Linghu Chong had expected. So he too cupped his hands and saluted back.

"That's quite alright!" he said as he pondered upon the question, "When someone shows great courtesy to his inferior, he must have his purpose. I wonder why he is treating me with such great respect."

He pondered over the question but still couldn't figure it out, so he decided to simply ask about it straight forth.

"Brother Tian, I have a question in my mind. Will you give me a straight answer?" he asked.

"I have no problem telling anything to anyone. For things like raping and looting, murdering and arson, others might

try to hide or deny them. When I, Tian Boguang, want to do something, I'll do it and admit to it! Why bother denying it?" Tian Boguang declared.

"Then, brother Tian, you are really an open and aboveboard true man," Linghu Chong commented.

"A true man? You are really flattering me. But at least I am an honest villain whose deeds match his words." Tian Boguang said.

"Aha, brother Tian, people of your type are really rare in the Martial World. Will you please answer this question for me? You had planned carefully to lure my Master far away from Mount Huashan, and then you came to Mount Huashan and insisted on having me leave together with you. Where on earth do you want me to go and what's your purpose?"

"I've told you right at the beginning that I am here to invite you to pay a visit to Little Sister Yilin so she won't be hurting from lovesickness."

"That is just so too absurd and bizarre. I am not a three-year old kid. How can I believe you?" Linghu Chong shook his head.

Tian Boguang was enraged. "I consider you a true hero, but you are treating me like I am the shameless low life scoundrel. Why can't you trust my words? Are you thinking that all the words that are coming out of my mouth are just crap? If there were anything untrue in my words, I would be even lower than a filthy pig," he snapped.

Feeling the sincerity in his words, Linghu Chong had to believe in him, and at the meantime, he was totally amazed. "Brother Tian, your submitting to become Little Sister Yilin's apprentice was just a joke, not to be taken seriously. Why did you come such a long way to invite me for her sake?" he asked in disbelief.

"Of course there are other reasons involved. Just with her little Kung Fu, how could she ever be worthy to be my Master?" Tian Boguang looked quite embarrassed.

Linghu Chong suddenly got an idea. He thought to himself, "Could it be possible that Tian Boguang has fallen in love with apprentice sister Yilin, and all his previous ill intention has transformed into deep affection?"

"Have you fallen in love with Little Sister Yilin at first sight and are most willing to do what she tells you?" Linghu Chong asked.

"You can stop imagining things. There's nothing even close to that!" Tian Boguang shook his head.

"Then what are the other reasons involved? Brother Tian, will you please share those with me?" Linghu Chong demanded.

"This is the worst luck for me. Why ask so much? In short, if I can't invite you down Mount Huashan, I will die a dreadful death," Tian Boguang answered.

"How could that be possible?" Linghu Chong was shocked, yet he didn't even bat an eyelid.

"Tian Boguang pushed up his clothes and exposed his chest. Pointing at two red spots as big as a coin right below his two nipples, he exclaimed, "Somebody has sealed my Death Acupoints here and also planted strong poison in my body so he can force me to come and invite you to pay a visit to the Little Sister. If I fail to accomplish the mission, then the two red spots will start to deteriorate and fester. By then, there will be no cure whatsoever and they will gradually expand all over my body until my entire body starts to decompose. After three years and six months I will eventually die because of the rotting."

With a very serious look on his face, he spoke again, "Brother Linghu, I am telling you the truth not because I want to earn your pity or anything. I just want you to know that no matter how persistent you are, I am determined to have you comply. I am open at all options at all cost. On normal days, I already stop at no evil. At a life-threatening moment like this, I would have no scruples."



"It seems like he is telling the truth," Linghu Chong thought to himself. "Then all I need to do is to not go down Mount Huashan with him. A month later when the poison in his body activates, the world will be rid of a big villain. There is really no need to kill him myself." So he said to Tian Boguang with a smile, "Which elite master was so mischievous to have done such a practical joke and gave you such a puzzle to solve? I wonder what kind of poison was planted in your body. Even the most dangerous poison can be detoxified somehow."

"There's no need to mention the one who sealed my Death Acupoints and planted poison in me. Other than the one who did it, there's only one other person in the entire world who might be able to detoxify the poison in my Death Acupoints - 'Killer Doctor' Ping One-Finger. But why would he want to work on me?" Tian Boguang said irritably.

"You can either beg him with polite words or threaten him with your knife on his neck. Maybe he might consider working on you," Linghu Chong said with a small grin.

"You can save all your sarcasm to yourself. In brief, if I can't get you to go with me, then I will be dead for sure, but you won't be able to stay safe either."

"Of course! Brother Tian, all you need is to beat me fair and square and make me feel sincerely convinced. Then in consideration of your great Kung Fu skills that took you quite some hard work to master, I might just agree to go down Mount Huashan with you. Will you please wait for me a bit more? I am going to enter the cave to think again.

He entered the cave, thinking to himself, "That day when I fought with him for several times, I was able to fight over thirty moves every time. How come I've actually slipped back now and simply can't take thirty of his moves any more?" Soon, he figured it out. "That's right! That day when I fought with him, ready to die any moment, I never cared if it was thirty moves or forty moves. Right now I keep counting the first move, the second move, the third move. All I care about

is how to take on the full set of thirty moves. With such distraction, then inevitably my sword skill is only half good compared to the last time. Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong! How dumb you are!”

After figuring the problem out, he was greatly encouraged and went on to study the Kung Fu on the rock wall. This time he focused on Taishan style sword art. Taishan style sword art was distinctively strong in its stableness and steadiness. Within such a short time, it would be impossible to truly grasp the essence of it. Besides, Linghu Chong wasn't too fond of the rigorous and well-behaved sword style either. He looked at the moves for a little while and was ready to leave when the nimble and agile moves of a short spear used to break Taishan style sword art caught his eyes. The more he studied them, the more fascinated he became, and soon he was so focused in it that he lost track of time, until Tian Boguang became impatient about the waiting and called him.

The two fought again. By then Linghu Chong became a little bit wiser and never bothered to count the moves again. As soon as the fight broke out, he waved his sword in different directions and launched a storm of attacks upon Tian Boguang. Seeing new sword moves emerging out of Linghu Chong in an endless stream and that every time after he thought about it in the cave, he would add many new meanings to the moves, Tian Boguang dared not to slack off. The two countered fast with faster, and exchanged many moves within a short moment. Suddenly Tian Boguang took a step forward, reaching out and grabbed onto Linghu Chong's wrist in the speed of a flash. He twisted Linghu Chong's arm back and pointed the sword tip right at Linghu Chong's throat. If he had wanted to, he could have pushed the sword forward and the long sword would have penetrated Linghu Chong's throat.

“You lost!” Tian Boguang yelled out.

"It was you. You lost!" Linghu Chong claimed as great pain came from his wrist.

"How did I lose?" Tian Boguang asked.

"This is the thirty-second move." Linghu Chong declared.

"Thirty-second move?" Tian Boguang asked in disbelief.

"Yep! Thirty-second move, precisely." Linghu Chong acknowledged.

"You weren't counting." Tian Boguang didn't buy it.

"Well, I wasn't counting with my tongue, but I was counting in my heart. It was plain and clear. This is the thirty-second move." Linghu Chong affirmed.

Actually he never really counted in his heart. The thirty-second move thing was just something he made up on the spot.

"That can't be true!" Tian Boguang let go of Linghu Chong's wrist and argued. "You thrust like this with your first move and I counter-attacked like this. You then blocked it like this and I chopped like this. That was the second move." He went on and on and was actually able to demonstrate every single move used in the last fight from the very beginning to the very end. After he counted till the move when he grabbed onto Linghu Chong's wrist, it was only the twenty-eighth move.

Linghu Chong was immensely amazed at Tian Boguang's ability in memorizing. The two of them had both fought with tremendous speed, yet he was able to memorize every single move so clearly in the exact order. That's some kind of talent one simply wouldn't see very often in the Martial World. Linghu Chong couldn't help but admire. He stuck his thumb out.

"Brother Tian, you have superb memory! I must have counted wrong. Let me go to think them over again."

"Wait!" Tian Boguang stopped him. "Something is really odd about this cave. I'd like to go in and take a look. Are there secret Kung Fu manuscripts hidden in the cave? Why is it that every time after you come out of the cave, you add

many strange moves to your collection?" He started walking toward the cave.

Linghu Chong was stunned. He thought quickly, "If he finds out about the drawings on the rock wall, it would be disastrous." He immediately showed a brief trace of happiness on his face and soon replaced it with a sad and worried look as he extended his arms out to block Tian Boguang's way.

"We have our school's secret Kung Fu manuscripts in the cave. Brother Tian, you are not a member of our Huashan Sword School. You can't go in there to tour around. Sorry!"

Noticing the very brief happy look on Linghu Chong's face that was quickly replaced by some kind of very exaggerated worried look, probably something he put out as a show, Tian Boguang pondered, "Why was he so happy as soon as he heard that I wanted to go in the cave? He pretended to be worried immediately afterwards. Obviously he was trying to hide his true feelings and hoped that I would rush into the cave recklessly. There must be something in that cave that would be detrimental to me. Probably some kind of booby-trap or ambush. Or maybe some kind of poisonous serpent or monster he has tamed. I am not going to fall for it!"

"I see. So there are secret Kung Fu manuscripts of your respected school. Then it wouldn't be appropriate for me to go tour around indeed," Tian Boguang pretended to agree.

Linghu Chong shook his head and appeared to be very disappointed. Later, he went back in the cave several more times and learned many more strange and weird moves, not only unique moves of the Five Mountains sword schools, but also many of those odd moves that would break the sword arts of the Five Mountains sword schools. But in the rush, he couldn't truly understand the essence of them, and because he had used them right after he picked them up minutes ago, their power was dramatically reduced and he still couldn't take on thirty moves of Tian Boguang's fast knife chops.

Tian Boguang couldn't understand why every time after Linghu Chong entered the cave to think more, he would be able to perform many odd and strange moves. Those odd and strange moves weren't really very useful in countering his own knife moves, but they were all so clever and brilliant that he had never seen anything like them in his entire life. It was almost like an amazing demonstration, and he secretly wished that the contest would go on so he would be able to observe more of the fantastic sword moves.

After Tian Boguang subdued Linghu Chong another time, noticing that it had already passed noon, he suddenly thought of something. "Most of the moves he used this time seemed to have been moves of Songshan style sword art. Could it be possible that there are elite grandmasters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance hiding in that cave? Every time when he goes into that cave, those elite grandmasters would then teach him some new moves and then send him out to fight me. Oops, luckily I didn't rush in that cave recklessly. How can I stand a chance fighting the many elite grandmasters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance?" At that thought, he blurted out.

"Why don't they come out?"

"Who?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Those elite senior grandmasters in the cave who taught you all those sword moves," Tian Boguang answered.

Linghu Chong was taken by surprise, but then immediately understood what Tian Boguang meant. He let out a big smile.

"Those senior grandmasters, they don't...don't feel like fighting you, brother Tian."

Tian Boguang was outraged. He gave a very disgruntled snort and then yelled out loudly, "I know these kinds of people. They fish for fame and compliments and profess to be above politics and worldly considerations. They feel it's beneath their dignity to fight me, the evil rapist Tian Boguang. You let them out. As long as we are fighting one on

one, regardless of how big of a reputation he has, he might not be able to beat me!”

“Brother Tian, if you are interested, go ahead and enter the cave to consult those eleven senior grandmasters. They actually think your knife skills are quite excellent,” Linghu Chong shook his head and said with a grin.

Linghu Chong knew that hence Tian Boguang had committed many crimes in the Martial World and had made many enemies, he had always been very careful in normal days. Now since he has assumed that there are elite masters from various schools in the cave, he would never risk going in the cave no matter how he was goaded. He intentionally used such an odd number eleven instead of ten to make it sound real.

Surely enough, Tian Boguang snorted and said, “What elite senior grandmasters? I am afraid they are all the ones with underserved reputation, otherwise, why after teaching you all kinds of moves again and again, you still can’t even take on thirty moves of mine?”

He was quite confident about his Qing-Gong skills and thought that even if those eleven elite masters all rushed out at the same time, although he wouldn’t stand a chance winning the fight, at least he would stand a very good chance of running away successfully. And besides, because all of them were elite senior grandmasters of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, they would value their own dignity dearly and never launch a joint attack at him.

Linghu Chong put on a serious face. “That’s only because I am dumb and clumsy with very limited inner energy and couldn’t grasp the essence of those senior grandmasters’ Kung Fu. Brother Tian, you’d better watch your mouth and not upset them. If any one of them decided to fight you, you don’t even have to wait for your poison to activate a month from now; your head would be missing from your neck on top of the ‘Cliff of Contemplation’ instantly.”

“Why don’t you tell me who those senior grandmasters are in the cave?” Tian Boguang demanded.

“Those senior grandmasters have lived in seclusion and lived a hermit’s life for a long time already. They have withdrawn from society for many years. Their gathering here has nothing to do with you, brother Tian. Their names can’t be revealed. But even if I do tell you who they are, you wouldn’t have heard of their names anyways. There’s no need to tell! No need to tell!” Linghu Chong had a very secretive look on his face.

Seeing the odd expression on Linghu Chong’s face, Tian Boguang was almost sure that Linghu Chong was trying to hide the truth. So he said, “Within Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan the four schools, there may be some exceptional senior grandmasters. But in your respectful school though, there isn’t any grandmasters left at all. Everybody knows about that in the Martial World. You must be talking irresponsibly and making things up. It’s hard for me to believe you.”

“That’s right. There really isn’t any elite senior grandmaster left in the Huashan Sword School. Many years ago, our sword school was so unfortunately hit by plagues, and all the elite fighters in the last generation withered and passed away. Brother Tian, you have said it correctly. There is really no grandmaster of our Huashan Sword School in the cave.” Linghu Chong affirmed.

Tian Boguang was convinced that Linghu Chong must have been lying to him. When he said something is false, then it should be true. If he had said that there weren’t any senior grandmasters left in Huashan Sword School, then there must be someone. He pondered over it for a long time and suddenly remembered something. He slapped his thigh with his palm and shouted out loud.

“Aha! I remember now! So it is senior grandmaster Feng Qingyang!”

Linghu Chong instantly remembered the characters “Feng Qingyang” carved on the rock wall in the cave and couldn’t help but utter a cry of surprise. He wasn’t pretending this time and was stunned when he thought that the senior grandmaster Feng might still be alive. Regardless of what the truth was, he waved his hand in denial hurriedly.

“Brother Tian, please don’t talk irresponsibly. Feng... Feng....”

He figured that since the name “Feng Qingyang” has a “Qing” character in it, then he must be from a more senior generation than Master’s “Bu” generation. So he continued with his sentence.

“Grand Uncle-Master Feng has quit the Martial World to live in seclusion many, many years ago. Nobody knows where he is, and no one is even sure that the respectful Grand Uncle-Master is still alive or not. How can he be on Mount Huashan right now? If you don’t believe me, then you’d better go in the cave and take a look yourself, then you will know the truth.”

The more Linghu Chong wanted Tian Boguang to go in the cave, the more Tian Boguang believed that it was a trap. He thought to himself, “He looks so panic-stricken. I must have figured it out right. I heard that many of the senior Huashan Sword School grandmasters all died unusual deaths in a single night except Feng Qingyang who happened to be away from Mount Huashan at the time and escaped that doom. So it turned out he is still alive. But he would be at least somewhere between seventy and eighty years old. No matter how high his Kung Fu level is at, he would have exhausted his strengths after all. The hell with him. Why would I be afraid of such a rotten old man?”

At that thought, he said to Linghu Chong, “Brother Linghu, we have already fought an entire day and an entire night. Even if we keep fighting, you wouldn’t stand a chance beating me. Although you have your Grand Uncle-Master Feng to give you pointers continuously, it’s useless after all.



Why don't you just behave yourself and follow me down Mount Huashan?"

Before Linghu Chong had a chance to answer, a cold voice suddenly rose from behind his back.

"If I had really given him some pointers, you don't think he can even take care of a chap like you? I doubt that!"

# **Chapter 10: Sword Training**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The old man nodded, let out a sigh, and then slowly walked to the front of the big rock to sit down. Tian Boguang yelled, “Here’s the chop!” and then slashed his knife at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong turned to the side to dodge and then fought back with a thrust.**

Linghu Chong was thunderstruck. He turned around and saw an old man with a gray beard in a green robe standing in front of the cave’s opening. The old man had a somewhat depressed expression on his face, which was as white as a sheet.

“Could this old man be the masked man in green robe I saw the other night? Where is he from? When did he come right behind my back? How come I didn’t feel a thing and had no idea about it?” He couldn’t help but feel bewildered.

“Are you...are you really Grandmaster Feng?” Tian Boguang asked in a trembling tone.

“It has gotten to be rare for people in this world to still remember my name.” The old man heaved a sigh.

In the instant, many thoughts flashed through Linghu Chong’s mind. “There is still a senior grandmaster of our Huashan Sword School alive today? Why haven’t I ever heard Master or Master-Wife mentioning anything about it? What if he is just an imposter who took the opportunity from Tian Boguang’s words? Wouldn’t everyone in the Martial World laugh at our Huashan Sword School if I recklessly salute him as a junior? Besides, what a big coincidence is this? As soon as Tian Boguang mentioned the name ‘Feng Qingyang,’ a ‘Feng Qingyang’ suddenly shows up right away?”

“Linghu Chong, what an useless lad you are!” The old man shook his head with another sigh. “Let me teach you. Use the move White Aurora Shooting the Sun first and follow up with Graceful Phoenix, then use Golden Geese Crossing Sky followed with Sword Interception Stance....” He talked on and on in a flow of eloquence and soon mentioned the names of thirty different moves.

Linghu Chong had learned all the thirty moves before, but the sword positions and the stances of those moves didn't seem to connect at all.

"What are you waiting for? Oh, I see. With your current understanding of martial arts, it isn't easy to just perform all thirty of them at once, indeed. Why don't you try them out slowly, first?" The old man instructed.

His voice was low and deep, and his face looked desolate. It almost appeared as if he had infinite grievance, yet there was a certain majestic feel in his tone.

"Well, there's nothing to lose if I give it a try," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

So he performed the White Aurora Shooting the Sun move and thrust his sword with the sword tip pointing up. Then he got stuck, having no clue how to connect the second move Graceful Phoenix to it.

"Alas! Idiot! Idiot! Only able to rigidly adhering to formalities with no adaptation, no wonder you are an apprentice of Yue Buqun. The art of swordplay calls for fluency like floating clouds and flowing water – natural and smooth, come and go freely. After you finished the move White Aurora Shooting the Sun and had your sword tip pointing up, couldn't you just follow the flow and slash it downwards? Even though there's no such posture in the move, why can't you adapt to the flow and make it more convenient for yourself?"

The words struck Linghu Chong's ears like bell rings and woke him. Slightly pulling the sword back with a slash, he naturally transformed it into the move Graceful Phoenix. Before it was entirely done, he had already changed it again and smoothly transformed it into the move Golden Geese Crossing the Sky. The long sword swished across above his head, and then with a hook and a jab, it easily turned into Sword Interception Stance – all the connections and transformations appeared to be smooth and flawless. With the ease of mind, he continued performing one move after

another following the old man's instruction. By the time he stopped at the move Ringing Bells and Drums, it was exactly a total of thirty moves. All of a sudden, Linghu Chong felt indescribable joy. On the old man's face, however, there was no trace of approval whatsoever.

"You got them connected alright, but see how stiff and rigid they are, also very clumsy. Even though you are still far from capable of fighting a master hand, it would be enough to deal with that little chap over there. Go ahead and try them out on him!" he demanded.

Linghu Chong still didn't quite believe that the old man was his Grand Uncle-Master, but he was quite convinced that the old man had to be an elite Kung Fu master. His sword pointing down at the ground, he bowed to salute to the old man, then turned to face Tian Boguang.

"Brother Tian, please go ahead!"

"I've seen you perform all thirty moves. What's there to fight about?" Tian Boguang questioned.

"If brother Tian doesn't want to fight, that's totally alright. Will you please leave now? I'd like to ask for some more advice from this senior master here. Sorry, can't be your company now," Linghu Chong said.

"What are you talking about? Do you expect me to just die for nothing only because you don't want to go down Mount Huashan with me?" Tian Boguang objected loudly. He turned to the old man.

"Grandmaster Feng, Tian Boguang is only a junior here. I am not worthy to exchange moves with you, the respectful one. If you join in the fight, it would really be beneath your dignity."

The old man nodded his approval with another sigh. He slowly walked by a big rock and sat down.

Tian Boguang felt great relief. "Look out!" he yelled and brought his knife swishing down upon Linghu Chong's head.

Linghu Chong dodged to the side and stabbed back with his long sword. The move was the fourth move Sword

Interception Stance the old man had told him earlier. Once starting his attack, he poured out many continuous moves with ease. Some of the moves he used were among the ones named by the old man, and some were outside of those thirty moves the old man had told him. Since he had comprehended the essence of the phrase “floating clouds and flowing water – natural and smooth, come and go freely,” his sword skills improved dramatically, and the fight went on well over a hundred moves.

All of a sudden, Tian Boguang roared loudly and chopped straight down. Knowing that it would be very difficult to dodge out of that one in time, Linghu Chong snapped his wrist and pointed his long sword toward Tian Boguang’s chest. Tian Boguang turned his knife around and smacked it at the sword. “Clank,” the knife and the sword clashed. Tian Boguang didn’t wait for Linghu Chong to pull back his sword. He simply let go of his own knife and jumped forward. Reaching out with his two hands, he seized Linghu Chong’s throat in a strangle hold. Linghu Chong was almost suffocated. In the rush, he dropped his long sword as well.

“If you don’t come with me, your old man here will choke you to death.” Tian Boguang yelled out.

He had been calling Linghu Chong a brother earlier with a very respectful tone. After the fierce fight of over a hundred moves, he really lost his temper and started calling himself Linghu Chong’s “old man” after he seized Linghu Chong’s throat.

Not able to breathe, Linghu Chong still shook his head as his face went purple from the choking.

“One hundred moves or two hundred moves, it doesn’t matter. As long as I am winning, you’ll have to go down Mount Huashan with me. The hell with the bet on the thirty moves thing. Your old man I don’t care!” Tian Boguang cursed between his teeth.

Linghu Chong wanted to laugh, but with Tian Boguang’s hands choking onto his throat hard, he couldn’t make any

sound.

"You idiot! Your finger can be used as a sword, too. Do you absolutely have to use a real sword for that Treasures All Over the Room move?" The old man reproved.

Those words worked the magic as a flash lighted in Linghu Chong's mind. He thrust out with his right hand and used the move Treasures All Over the Room. His middle finger and index finger struck the Tan-Zhong Acupoint on Tian Boguang's chest in a jab; Tian Boguang uttered a muffled groan and collapsed onto the ground, his hands letting go of Linghu Chong's throat.

Linghu Chong had no idea that such a casual jab would actually subdue the "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, a man who enjoyed great fame for his Kung Fu skills in the martial world, in such an easy manner. He gently rubbed his own throat, which was still hurting uncomfortably from Tian Boguang's choking, and then looked down at the evil rapist, who laid on the ground huddled up, twitching involuntarily. Seeing Tian Boguang showing the whites of his eyes and having lost his consciousness, Linghu Chong found himself deeply amazed and overjoyed. Instantly, he felt tremendous admiration toward the old man. Rushing by the old man's side, he knelt down and kowtowed.

"Grand Uncle-Master! Will you please pardon me! I have treated you with such disrespect."

"You don't think I am just swindling and bluffing now?" The old man let out a slight smile.

"I dare not! Grandmaster Feng, I am so fortunate to be able to meet a senior grandmaster of our school! This is so marvelous." He kowtowed more.

"You can get up now," the old man Feng Qingyang said.

Only after another three respectful kowtows, Linghu Chong stood up. Noticing that the old man had a very pale and pallid complexion, looking wan and sallow, he asked, "Grand Uncle-Master, are you hungry? I have some food in



the cave. Let me go get them.” He turned around and headed toward the cave.

“No need for that!” Feng Qingyang shook his head.

He squinted at the sun and then murmured, “The sunshine is so warm! It has been a long time since I last basked in the wonderful sunshine.”

Linghu Chong was taken by surprise, but he dared not ask.

Feng Qingyang threw a glance at the huddled up Tian Boguang on the ground. “You have jabbed onto his Tan-Zhong Acupoint,” he said. “With his mastery of martial arts skills, he will probably regain his consciousness in two hours. By then, he’ll start another round of harassing. Once you beat him one more time, he would have no choice but to behave and leave. After you subdue him, you must force him to swear a deadly oath that he would never mention to anyone that he had seen me.”

“When I won earlier, it was only because I got lucky and took him by surprise. I am still no match for him with my sword skills. To be able to subdue him...subdue him...,” Linghu Chong murmured.

Feng Qingyang shook his head. “You are Yue Buqun’s apprentice. I really shouldn’t teach you any Kung Fu. That day...that day...I swore an oath that I would never fight anyone in the remaining of my life. When I demonstrated the sword moves to you the other night, I just wanted to let you know that if one executes the Huashan Sword School’s Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword the right way, how can anyone ever flick the sword out of your grip? I suppose if I don’t make you do the work, I won’t be able to force a deadly oath out of Tian Boguang, promising not to let out the secret. You, follow me.”

Feng Qingyang walked in the cave and entered the back cave through the hole on the rock wall. Linghu Chong followed in behind him.

"You have studied and memorized all those drawings of Huashan style sword art on the rock wall. When you used them though, they were all totally off. Alas!" Feng Qingyang pointed at the rock wall and shook his head.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "So when I was studying those drawings here during those many times, Grand Uncle-Master had been watching me. I guess every time I was simply too focused in studying and didn't even notice that someone else was actually in the cave as well. If... if Grand Uncle-Master had been an enemy...hmm, if he were an enemy, even if I had found out about it, would I then have any chance of surviving?"

"The chap Yue Buqun is a total moron. You are very good apprentice material, but he turned you into a dumb fool with his teaching." Feng Qingyang continued.

Hearing Feng Qingyang's humiliating words to his respectful Master, Linghu Chong was very displeased.

"Grand Uncle-Master, I don't want you to teach me any more. I'll just go outside and force Tian Boguang to swear the oath, promising that he will never let out Grand Uncle-Master's secret," he said in a bold tone.

Feng Qingyang was seized by surprise, but it only took him an instant to understand the reason behind. "What if he won't agree? Are you going to kill him?" he asked dryly.

Linghu Chong hesitated and didn't know how to answer. He thought that since Tian Boguang had never intended to kill him even when he won the many fights, how could he himself be so cruel to kill Tian Boguang immediately after he got the upper hand?

"You are blaming me for swearing at your Master, aren't you? Fine. I won't mention his name any more. He calls me Uncle-Master. It should be alright for me to call him a 'chap,' shouldn't it?" Feng Qingyang asked.

"Grand Uncle-Master, if you stop scolding my respectful Master, of course I will listen to your advice cautiously," Linghu Chong replied.

"This is almost like I am begging you to learn from me." Feng Qingyang was amused.

"I dare not. Grand Uncle-Master, I beg for your pardon." Linghu Chong bowed.

Feng Qingyang pointed at the drawings of the Huashan style sword art on the rock wall and started explaining.

"These moves are indeed the unique moves among our school's sword arts. Most of them have long been lost, and even Yue...Yue...hmm...even your Master doesn't know them. Even though they are brilliant moves, when you use them one move at a time, others would still be able to overcome them...."

Hearing these words, Linghu Chong felt a sudden inspiration and vaguely understood an ultimate principle of sword art. He couldn't help but show a wild, joyful face.

"What have you figured out? Tell me about it." Feng Qingyang requested.

"Grand Uncle-Master, are you saying that if all the moves become an integral whole, then the enemy would have no way of breaking them?" Linghu Chong stated.

"Didn't I say that you are good material? You have very good comprehension." Feng Qingyang nodded happily. "Those Demon Cult Elders...." He pointed at the staff-wielding figure on the rock wall as he spoke.

"Is that an Elder of the Demon Cult?" Linghu Chong asked in bewilderment.

"Didn't you know? The ten skeletons are the remains of the Demon Cult Ten Elders," Feng Qingyang said while pointing at a skeleton on the ground.

"Why did all the Demon Cult Ten Elders fall dead here?" Linghu Chong became quite curious.

"Tian Boguang will wake up in two more hours. If you keep asking about these past events of many years ago, do you think you'll still have time left to learn some Kung Fu?" Feng Qingyang reproved.

“Right! Right! Grand Uncle-Master, please go on.” Linghu Chong replied.

“Those Demon Cult Elders had truly outstanding and brilliant minds. They were actually able to defeat the advanced moves of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance cleanly and completely.” Feng Qingyang sighed. “They didn’t know, however, that the most devastating move in the world is not inside Kung Fu, but in setting up schemes, intrigues, and traps. If one falls into someone’s clever trap, regardless of how brilliant his Kung Fu moves are, it would still be completely useless....” At these words, he raised his head and fell into a daze. Apparently he had remembered many things from the past.

Hearing the bitterness in his tone and seeing the anguish look on his face, Linghu Chong dared not interrupt and only thought to himself, “Could it be true that the Five Mountains Sword Alliance really had ‘no way to win in a fair fight,’ so they tricked the enemy into a trap? Grand Uncle-Master Feng is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, but he probably didn’t object to such contemptible means. I guess in order to counter the enemies from the Demon Cult, it is probably necessary to use some contemptible means.”

Feng Qingyang went on talking. “If we judge them by their understanding of advanced Kung Fu theories, these Demon Cult Elders shouldn’t be counted as ones who have entered the realm of top level Kung Fu. They didn’t know that moves are static, but the one executing the moves is alive. No matter how clever the counter-move is for breaking static moves, as soon as they encounter moves performed in a lively way, they would feel like their arms and legs are all tied up and would have no other choice but to give themselves up to the opponent’s mercy. You must remember the keyword ‘lively’ here. When you learn a move, you need to learn it in a lively way; when you execute a move, you also need to execute it lively. If you only rigidly adhere to formalities without adding your own lively elements, even if

you have mastered thousands or tens of thousands unique moves, as soon as you encounter a true elite master hand, he would still be able to overcome every single one of them.”

Linghu Chong felt tremendous joy in his heart. He was the unrestrained and unconventional type. Each of Feng Qingyang’s word struck a chord in his heart. He kept agreeing and agreeing, “Yes, yes! One must learn it lively and use it lively.”

“Each of the Five Mountains sword schools have countless number of idiots who believed that as long as they become proficient with the sword moves taught by their masters then naturally they would become elite fighters.” He paused and let out a disgruntled snort. “You must have heard of the saying, ‘Once memorizing three hundred poems well, one will be capable to write poems himself!’ After memorizing others’ poems well, one might be able to write a couple of ragged verses, but without being original in conception, can he ever become a real poet?” Feng Qingyang criticized.

His criticism naturally included Yue Buqun as one of the “idiots” he had mentioned, but since firstly, Linghu Chong felt the comments were quite convincing, and secondly, Feng Qingyang didn’t mention Yue Buqun’s name specifically, he didn’t argue.

“Learn it lively and use it lively is only the first step. Only when you can fight with no moves, you will eventually reach the realm of a true elite fighter. When you said ‘all the moves become an integral whole, then the enemy would have no way of breaking them’ earlier, you’ve only gotten less than half right. It’s not ‘an integral whole’ but simply no moves. No matter how hard you work on making the moves an integral whole, as long as there’s a trace of the connection, your enemy would have a flaw to exploit. If you don’t have any moves at all, then how is your enemy going to break your move?”

Linghu Chong's heart thumped wildly and even his palms became burning hot as he mumbled, "No move at all, how do you break it? No move at all, how do you break it?" Suddenly, a whole new world he had never seen before or even dreamed about appeared in front of his eyes.

Feng Qingyang continued. "If you want to slice a piece of meat, you need to have the piece of meat before you can slice it; if you want to cut some firewood, you need to have the firewood before you can cut it; if your enemy wants to break your sword move, he needs to have your sword move before he can break it. When an ordinary person who has never learned any Kung Fu waves a sword wildly, no matter how knowledgeable you are, you still wouldn't be able to predict where his next thrust or chop will land. Even someone with the most advanced sword skills still wouldn't be able to defeat his move. Because there is no move, it's impossible to break the move. If this person has never learned any Kung Fu, then even though he doesn't have a sword move, others can still knock him down easily. True first-class sword art, on the other hand, will enable you to control others, not controlled by others."

He picked up a shinbone from the ground and randomly pointed one end of it at Linghu Chong. "How are you going to break this move of mine?"

Linghu Chong had no idea what move that was. After a pause, he said, "This is not a move, so there's no way I can break it."

"That's correct." Feng Qingyang smiled. "When a Kung Fu practitioner uses a weapon or throw punches and kicks, he would always have moves. All you need to know is how to overcome it, and once you do know how, you can easily defeat his move and subdue him."

"But what if the enemy didn't have any move either?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Then he must be a first-class elite fighter also. The result of the fight could go either way. Maybe you are better, or

maybe he's better," Feng Qingyang answered. He let out a sigh and said, "In today's world, it's very difficult to find such an elite fighter. If by chance you meet one or two, then you have really good fortune. During my entire life, I've only met three of them."

"Who are these three?" Linghu Chong couldn't help but ask.

Feng Qingyang stared at him for a short while and then split into a smile. "Among Yue Buqun's apprentices, there's actually one who likes to poke his nose everywhere and not willing to devote himself to sword training. Great! Wonderful!"

"Sorry, I am wrong." Linghu Chong blushed and quickly bowed for forgiveness.

"No, you are not wrong." Feng Qingyang smiled. "You are a lively lad, just the type to my liking. We don't have much time left. You go ahead and work on merging all the thirty to forty Huashan style sword art moves together. Think how you can get them going smoothly with no interruption, and then try to forget all of them. You need to forget all of them completely without leaving a single one in your head. Then, a bit later, you can use the Huashan Style Sword Art With No Moves to fight Tian Boguang."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered, feeling half surprised and half pleased.

Linghu Chong studied the drawings on the rock with rapt attention. During the past several months, he had memorized the Huashan style sword moves on the rock wall well, so he didn't have to spend any time learning the moves. All he had to do was to try to connect all the distinct and separate sword moves together.

"Everything must be following the natural rhythm. Act when you have to act and stop when you have to stop. If you simply can't connect some of them, then don't connect them. In short, don't force anything," Feng Qingyang pointed out.

Linghu Chong nodded. Since all he had to do was to follow the natural flow, it became an easy task for him regardless of connecting them cleverly or clumsily. Soon, he had connected all the thirty to forty moves of Huashan style sword art together. But to merge all of them into one with no traceable rigid gaps was not so easy. He waved his sword, sometimes slashing to the left, sometimes chopping to the right, without thinking about any moves drawn on the rock wall. He didn't care if his posture or position was close to the drawing or not and simply followed his own will. Occasionally when he had a smooth one, he couldn't help but feeling quite pleased with himself.

He had been in sword training for over ten years. Every time when he practiced, he would always stay very focused with all his heart, not daring to slack in any way. Yue Buqun was a very strict teacher. When his apprentices practiced forms or sword arts, if anyone's arm or leg were slightly off from the perfect position, he would immediately correct them. Everyone's every move or posture had to be in the absolutely perfect position without a single error to get his approval. Linghu Chong was the first and most senior apprentice, besides, he was always eager to do well in everything and excel others. In order to gain praises from Master and Master-Wife, he always put in extra efforts to be strict with himself. Feng Qingyang, on the other hand, had taught in a totally opposite way – the more casual the better. That fitted in with his personality just perfectly. He felt the kind of carefree and joy beyond words, and it seemed as if the pleasure was even more enjoyable than drinking ages old good wine. While he was still intoxicated in practicing, Tian Boguang had shouted from outside.

“Brother Linghu, will you please come out so we can have another contest.”

That brought Linghu Chong back to reality. He stopped and stood still.



“Grand Uncle-Master, do you think this random slashing and chopping style sword form of mine will enable me to block his fast knife chops?” Linghu Chong asked hopefully.

“If you want to block, of course it won’t help you much. But why do you have to block?” Feng Qingyang said.

Linghu Chong immediately got the idea and the feeling of joy washed over him.

“That’s right. He is begging me to go down Mount Huashan with him, so of course he dared not to kill me. In that case, despite what knife moves he uses, I can simply ignore them and just focus on my own attacks.”

Linghu Chong stepped out of the cave with his sword in his hand and saw Tian Boguang waiting with his knife drawn.

“Brother Linghu, after Grandmaster Feng gave you some knacks and pointers, your sword skills surely improved a lot. However, when you sealed my point just now, it was only because of my oversight. I am not convinced yet. Let’s have another fight,” Tian Boguang suggested.

“Fine!” Linghu Chong answered as he thrust his sword out in a crooked manner. The blade wobbled as it moved forward; there was no strength attached in the thrust at all.

“What kind of move is that?” Tian Boguang was bewildered.

Seeing Linghu Chong’s sword getting closer, Tian Boguang was just about to fend it off using his knife when Linghu Chong suddenly pulled his right hand back and jabbed the sword toward an empty space. Then following the jab, Linghu Chong retracted the sword quickly. The sword handle almost struck his own chest when he flicked his wrist, which sent the sword handle to another empty space to his right. Tian Boguang was even more bewildered. He threw a gentle probing chop cautiously. Linghu Chong didn’t even care to dodge and simply drove his sword tip toward his opponent’s lower stomach in an angle.

“How weird!” Tian Boguang shouted as he turned his knife around to block it.

After the two exchanged several moves, Linghu Chong started using the Huashan style sword moves on the rock wall, attacking without any defending, almost as if he was just practicing sword form all by himself. The continuous attacks sent Tian Boguang into a frantic rush.

“If you decide to ignore this chop of mine again, don’t blame me when I chop your arm off!” Tian Boguang shouted.

“It’s not going to be that easy!” Linghu Chong grinned as he initiated another three thrusts, all attacked from very odd and unusual positions. Relying on his fast eyes and quick hands, Tian Boguang successfully fended all of them off. Just when he was about to start his counter-attack, Linghu Chong suddenly threw his long sword straight up in the air. Tian Boguang looked up at the sword in the air when suddenly a heavy punch landed squarely on his nose. Blood immediately gushed out from his nose. While Tian Boguang was still in shock, Linghu Chong used his hand as a sword and stabbed it out, and it struck Tian Boguang on his Tan-Zhong Acupoint once again. Tian Boguang slowly collapsed down, his face covered with a mixture of confusion and anger.

Linghu Chong turned around and Feng Qingyang called him back into the cave.

“You just got yourself another three hours for sword training. He is hurt even worse this time. He won’t be able to wake up as easily as the last time. Only that when you fight him the next time, maybe he’ll go all out and might not yield to you any more. You must be very careful. Go ahead and try out those Hengshan style sword art moves.” Feng Qingyang suggested.

After getting more pointers and advice from Feng Qingyang, Linghu Chong used each move as if there was no move – with the essence of the move but without the form of it. Those unique Hengshan style sword moves by themselves were already extremely unpredictable and volatile, now it was even more difficult to find any trace of gap among them.

After Tian Boguang woke up, the two of them fought another seventy to eighty moves before Tian Boguang got knocked down once again.

It was already quite late in the day. Linghu Chong placed Tian Boguang, who was unable to move at all because of the sealed acupoints, behind some big rocks when Lu Dayou brought food up the cliff, while Feng Qingyang stayed inside the back cave.

"Sixth apprentice brother, I am having some real good appetites these days. Will you please bring some extra food tomorrow?" Linghu Chong asked.

Lu Dayou could tell that his big apprentice brother's face glowed with health and radiating vigor, quite different from the depressed and upset one in the last couple months. He couldn't help with his joy. He also noticed that Linghu Chong's robe was soaked with sweat and thought that Linghu Chong must have been practicing assiduously with his sword techniques.

"Great! I'll bring up a large basket full of food tomorrow," he said.

After Lu Dayou left, Linghu Chong opened Tian Boguang's sealed acupoints and invited him and Feng Qingyang to have dinner together. Feng Qingyang had enough after only a half bowl full of rice. Tian Boguang on the other hand, felt very aggrieved and had no appetite at all, raking the food in his mouth and pouring out streams of abuses at the same time. Suddenly, with a loud crack, the china bowl in his hand smashed into pieces from the tremendous forces coming from his grip. Broken china pieces and rice fell all over his clothes and the floor.

"Brother Tian, why are you being so hard on a rice bowl?" Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter.

"Damn it, I am being hard on you," Tian Boguang yelled in rage. "When we fought, you took advantage of me and spared no effort in defending yourself whatsoever, only because I didn't want to kill you. Tell me, you think this is

fair? If I hadn't given ground to you, I'd have chopped your head off within thirty moves. Humph! Humph! Damn the little...little...."

Obviously he had wanted to scold Yilin, the little nun, but for some reason he stopped short, instead, he stood up and drew his knife.

"Linghu Chong, come and fight me again if you've got guts," he yelled out.

"Fine!" Linghu Chong replied and stepped forth, sword in hand.

Using the same strategy again, Linghu Chong paid no attention to Tian Boguang's fast knife chops and simply stabbed his sword at Tian Boguang with clever moves. But this time Tian Boguang was quite relentless. After they exchanged about twenty moves or so, he threw two chops - one landed on Linghu Chong's thigh and the other one left a cut on Linghu Chong's left arm. He had shown some mercy after all - neither of the two wounds was critical. In astonishment accompanied by great pain, Linghu Chong found himself in a very awkward situation. His sword techniques became very sluggish and only a few move later, Tian Boguang kicked him down to the ground.

"Do you want more fights?" Placing the sharp blade right next to Linghu Chong's throat, Tian Boguang yelled. "Humph, I'll make sure to leave a couple of cuts on you every time, so even though you won't die, your blood will drain and your arms and legs will look really good."

"Of course I want more fights! Even if I can't beat you, do you think my Grand Uncle-Master Feng would just look on with folded arms and let you ride roughshod?" Linghu Chong rebuffed with a smile.

"He is a senior grandmaster. He won't pick a fight with me," Tian Boguang said as he moved his knife away.

Fearing that Feng Qingyang might start a fight out of anger because he had wounded Linghu Chong, Tian Boguang was actually quite apprehensive. Even though Feng

Qingyang looked very old, he sure wasn't rotten. From Feng's piercing eyes, Tian Boguang could tell that Feng must have excellent inner energy, not mentioning his god-like sword skills. He figured that Feng didn't even have to kill – all Feng needed to do was to drive him down Mount Huashan, and that would be just as bad.

Linghu Chong tore a piece of his robe off and used it to wrap up the two wounds before entering the cave.

"Grant Uncle-Master, that chap has changed his strategy and decided to cut me for real now! If my right arm gets wounded and can't use a sword anymore, it would be impossible to beat him." Linghu Chong shook his head in a wry smile.

"Luckily it's late already. You can tell him that you'll fight him again tomorrow morning. Let's not sleep tonight. I'll use the entire night to teach you three sword moves," Feng Qingyang instructed.

"Three moves?" Linghu Chong repeated, not understanding why a mere three sword moves would take up an entire night to learn.

"You look like a smart one. I wonder if you are really that smart or only look like one. If you are truly smart, then you might be able to learn the three sword moves within the night. If you aren't smart and only have ordinary comprehension, then...then...there would be no need to fight him again tomorrow morning, and you can simply admit your failure and follow him off Mount Huashan!" Feng Qingyang said.

Hearing those words from his Grand Uncle-Master, Linghu Chong knew that the three sword moves must be very extraordinary and sophisticated. That actually aroused his willingness to take on the challenge.

"Grand Uncle-Master," he said fearlessly, "if I can't learn these three sword moves within one night, then I'd rather die from his blade than surrender and leave Mount Huashan with him."

“Good.” Feng Qingyang smiled. He raised his head and thought for quite a while before finally saying, “To learn three moves within one night is really asking for the impossible. You won’t need the second move just yet. We can work on only the first one and the third one. But...but...many of the variations in the third move come from the second move. Very well! Let’s ignore all the related variations and see if it will work.”

He was more like talking to himself. But after thinking about it for a moment, he shook his head.

Seeing the worried look on Feng Qingyang’s face, Linghu Chong became very anxious. The harder it is to learn a type of martial arts, of course, the more powerful it will be. Then he heard Feng Qingyang murmuring again.

“If he forgets one of the three hundred and sixty variations in the first move, then he would get the third move wrong. That’s not going to work.”

Linghu Chong was astonished when he heard that only the first move already contained three hundred and sixty variations.

Feng Qingyang started counting with his fingers. “Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You. Jia turns into Bing, Bing turns into Geng, Geng turns into Kui. Zi connects Chou, Chen connects Si, Wu connects Wei. Wind to thunder is one change, mountain to lake is one change, water to fire is one change. Qian and Kun activate each other, Zhen and Dui activate each other, Li and Si activate each other. Three increases to five, five increases to nine....”

The more he counted the more worried he looked. Finally he said with a heavy sigh, “Chong, when I learned this move, it took me three months. To expect you to learn two moves in one night is really like a joke. Think about it, ‘Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang....’”

At those words, he stopped talking and apparently was lost in deep thought. After a long while, he asked.

“Now, where was I?”

“Grand Uncle-Master, you said Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Ha, you’ve got good memory. What’s next?” Feng Qingyang raised his eyebrows.

“Grand Uncle-Master said, ‘Jia turns into Bing, Bing turns into Geng, Geng turns into Kui....’” Linghu Chong recited along and was actually able to repeat almost half of what Feng Qingyang said, but he could no longer remember the rest of it.

“Have you learned the General Index of the Dugu Nine Swords before?” Feng Qingyang was astonished.

“No. I have never learned anything like that before. I had no idea that this is called the Dugu Nine Swords.” Linghu Chong replied.

“If you haven’t learned it before, how come you are able to recite it?” Feng Qingyang asked.

“I just memorized it when you read it just now,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Hey, this might work!” Feng Qingyang slapped his thigh in excitement. “Although you won’t be able to learn the whole thing, you can simply memorize it. It would be alright if we only learn half of the third move. Now remember these: Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You....”

He went on and on and recited over three hundred words before finally saying, “Give it a try. Recite it.”

Linghu Chong had been staying very focused trying to memorize the script. After getting the go, he started reciting and only missed ten words or so. Feng Qingyang corrected them. The second time when Linghu Chong recited them, he only missed seven words. By the time he finished reciting the script a third time, he didn’t miss any word at all.

“Excellent! Excellent!” Feng Qingyang was very pleased. He then taught Linghu Chong another section of the script

about three hundred words long. After Linghu Chong memorized those well, he taught the next section of about three hundred words to Linghu Chong.

The General Index of the Dugu Nine Swords had a total of over three thousand words, besides, the contents of the script weren't really connected to each other logically, so even though Linghu Chong had extraordinary memorizing abilities, he still couldn't help but remember parts of it while forgetting other parts of it. It took him over two hours and many reminders from Feng Qingyang to finally memorize the entire script with no errors. Feng Qingyang made him recite the script from the very beginning to the very end another three times and was finally convinced that he had memorized all of them.

"The General Index is the key and foundation of the Dugu Nine Swords. Even though you have memorized it at the moment, you only did it by ear for the sake of saving time while having no idea about the theories behind. You can forget about it as easily. From now on, you must recite it days and nights."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered.

"The first move of the Dugu Nine Swords, General Index Stance, has many variations to implement the General Index Script. Let's not rush into that one yet. The second move, Sword-breaking Stance, can be used to overcome sword arts from every single school or cult in the world. No need to rush into that one either. The third move, Knife-breaking Stance, can be used to overcome knife moves of Single Knife, Double Knives, Willow-Leaf Cutlass, Ghost-Beheaded Saber, Large Cleaver, Horse-Cutting Blade, and so on. Tian Boguang is using the Fast Knife Chops technique out of the Single Knife moves. Let's focus on learning the part about how to overcome his knife techniques specifically tonight."

Realizing that the second move of the Dugu Nine Swords could overcome all the sword arts from all the schools and clans out there, and the third move of the Dugu Nine Swords



could overcome all the knife moves, while feeling stunned, Linghu Chong couldn't help but show his joy.

"The nine stances must be very brilliant. I have never heard of it before." Because of the great excitement, his voice trembled.

"Your Master probably has never seen the moves of the Dugu Nine Swords, but he sure has heard about the name Dugu Nine Swords before. He just doesn't want to mention it to you, that's all," Feng Qingyang said.

"Why's that?" Linghu Chong asked with surprise.

Feng Qingyang didn't answer the question and went on explaining the moves. "The third move, Knife-breaking Stance, stresses on using light to resist heavy and using fast to overcome slow. The chap Tian Boguang's fast knife chops are surely very fast, so you will have to be even faster than him. For a young lad like you, it's probably ok to try to be faster than him; you might win or you might lose. There's no guaranteed success. For an old rotten folk like me, if I still wanted to be faster than him, then the only solution would be launching my attack before he even starts his. If you can foresee what kind of a move he will be using and then scramble before him, before the enemy even raised his hand, your sword is already pointing at his vital parts. That way no matter how fast your enemy is, you will still be faster."

"Yes, yes! So it teaches about how to anticipate the enemy beforehand." Linghu Chong nodded again and again.

"Good, good! You got it!" Feng Qingyang praised as he applauded. "'Anticipating the enemy beforehand' is precisely the key to this set of sword techniques. Before anyone executes a move, there will always be many signs that you can catch. If he plans to slash toward your left arm with his next chop, he will certainly cast a glance at your left arm, and if his knife is in the lower right part at the time, then of course he will raise his knife in an arc before swishing his blade down in an angle."

Feng Qingyang went on and explained all the variations in the third sword stance that would overcome fast knife chops, one by one in great details. Linghu Chong felt so relaxed and happy as he listened in. He almost felt like that he was a country boy who had just entered the inner circle of the royal palace, and every single thing he saw or heard was new and interesting. The third sword stance had very complicated variations, and within the limited time, Linghu Chong was only able to comprehend about twenty percent of it. He simply worked hard on memorizing the rest.

The teacher taught enthusiastically and the student studied energetically; both of them lost track of time completely. Suddenly, Tian Boguang shouted outside of the cave.

“Brother Linghu, it’s daybreak now! Are you awake yet?”

“Wow, it’s daybreak already,” Linghu Chong uttered.

“It’s a pity that we had so little time.” Feng Qingyang sighed. “You’ve learned very quickly, way beyond my expectation already. Go ahead and fight him,” he said.

“Yes.” Linghu Chong answered. He closed his eyes and went through the gist of all the things he had learned during the night in his head. Suddenly he opened his eyes and asked.

“Grand Uncle-Master, I still have one more question. Why are all the variations attacking techniques with no defending ones at all?”

“Dugu Nine Swords, once stepping in, never steps back! Every technique is an attacking technique. When you force your enemy to have no other choice but to defend himself, of course there’s no need to defend yourself. Senior master Dugu Seeking-A-Loss, who created this set of sword techniques, had a name ‘Seeking-A-Loss.’ He had been seeking a loss all his life and still couldn’t get one. Once the sword techniques were executed, he would become unmatched anywhere in the world. Why would he have to defend? If anyone could have forced him to draw his sword

back and defend himself, the respectful master would have burst with joy and be delighted beyond measure.” Feng Qingyang said.

“Dugu Seeking-A-Loss, Dugu Seeking-A-Loss,” Linghu Chong muttered as he imagined how the senior master had wandered about the Martial World, unmatched anywhere, with only his sword, and couldn’t even find a single one who was capable of forcing him into a defending stance. That was truly admirable.

“Hurry up! Come out! Let me give you two more cuts!” Tian Boguang’s voice rose again.

“I am coming!” Linghu Chong replied.

“I am very concerned about one thing right now.” Feng Qingyang knitted his eyebrows together. “When you go out to fight him, if he injures your right arm or right wrist as soon as the fight breaks out, then you would be incapable to fight and leave yourself at his mercy. I am quite worried about that.”

“I’ll do my best, Grand Uncle-Master! You didn’t waste all that time teaching me with all your heart. I won’t let you down no matter what,” Linghu Chong said fearlessly, in high spirits.

As soon as he stepped out of the cave, he immediately put on a dejected and apathetic face. After a yawn, a stretch, and then some rubbing into his eyes, he finally said to Tian Boguang.

“Hey, brother Tian, you got up too early. Didn’t you have a good rest last night?”

In the mean time, he was actually thinking to himself, “All I need is to hold out through this current one. If I get to study several more hours, I would never be afraid of him again.”

“Brother Linghu,” Tian Boguang said as he raised his knife, “I really don’t intend to hurt you, but you are simply too stubborn and won’t go down Mount Huashan with me. If we continue fighting like this, I’ll be forced to add ten or

twenty more cuts on you and have you beaten black and blue. Wouldn't that be too bad for you?"

Linghu Chong suddenly got an idea. "You don't even need to add ten or twenty more cuts on me. All you need to do is to cut my right arm off or injure my right hand, so I can't use a sword. Then wouldn't I be at your disposal as you wish? Either to kill me or take me prisoner?"

"I only want you to admit your loss. Why do I want to injure your right arm or right hand?" Tian Boguang shook his head.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed, yet he put on a very depressed face. "I am afraid that you are just saying it right now. Once you get mad because of your losses, you would spare no effort in using all kinds of cruel and vicious tactics," he complained.

"You don't have to goad me. First, I have no grudges against you; secondly, I respect you as a true man with integrity; thirdly, if I injure you too badly, I am afraid someone might come and give me trouble. Go ahead!" Tian Boguang said.

"Alright! Brother Tian, please go ahead." Linghu Chong replied.

Tian Boguang gave a fake slash and immediately followed it with a tilted chop. His blade flashed in the sunshine with blinding reflections and the chop looked very vicious. Linghu Chong was about to overcome it with one of the variations in the third sword stance out of the Dugu Nine Swords, but Tian Boguang's knife moves came too fast, by the time he was going to attack, the knife move had already changed. He was just one step too slow.

"How terrible! How terrible! I can't even be fast enough to use the newly learned sword techniques. Grand Uncle-Master must be calling me an idiot right now," Linghu Chong groaned inwardly in great worries.

After a few more moves, cold sweats started rolling down Linghu Chong's forehead. But in Tian Boguang's eyes, his

sword techniques looked extremely fierce, and every move seemed as if it was the exact restraint to Tian's knife moves. Tian Boguang couldn't help but feel worried.

"He could have killed me with the last several sword techniques. Why did he slow it down just a little bit intentionally?" he thought to himself. "Oh, I got it. He is being lenient and wants to beat me into a retreat in the face of difficulties. But even though I see the difficulties, I can't simply retreat. I have to hold out with all my might."

Because of these thoughts, with every chop, he dared not to use all his strength and made sure he would always have extra energy left in case of an emergency. The two dreaded each other and both fought in a very cautious manner.

After a while, Tian Boguang gradually increased his knife chopping speed, and Linghu Chong also became more familiar with the variations of the Dugu Nine Swords third sword stance. While lights of the knife and the sword flashed, the two fought faster and faster.

Suddenly Tian Boguang let out a loud roar as he threw a kick with his right foot, which struck Linghu Chong in the stomach. Linghu Chong fell down facing up.

In the split of a second, Linghu Chong thought, "All I need is another day and night. This time tomorrow I am sure I can beat him." He let go of his sword, shut his eyes tight, held his breath, and pretended to be knocked out cold.

Seeing that Linghu Chong laid on the ground unconscious, Tian Boguang was stunned. But knowing that Linghu Chong was cunning and crafty, he dared not to bend over to check, afraid that Linghu Chong might jump up and attack all of a sudden to seek a victory from a defeat. So he crossed his blade in front of him and then took a couple of steps closer.

"Brother Linghu? Are you alright?" he called out.

He called a few more times and found Linghu Chong finally regaining himself slowly with little breathing.

"Let's...let's fight again." Linghu Chong said in a trembling voice.

He struggled to stand up, but half way up, his left leg gave out and he fell on the ground again.

"You are not going to make it. Why don't you have a good rest for a day and then follow me down Mount Huashan tomorrow?" Tian Boguang suggested.

Linghu Chong didn't express any opinion of his and pushed the ground with one hand, trying to stand up while panting hard.

With no more doubts, Tian Boguang took a step forward and grabbed onto Linghu Chong's right arm to prop him up, but when he took the step forward, his foot "happened" to step on top of Linghu Chong's long sword on the ground, and while guarding himself with the knife in his right hand, his grip also happened to grab onto an acupoint on Linghu Chong's right arm to make sure Linghu Chong couldn't play any tricks. Linghu Chong's entire body weight hung onto Tian Boguang's left arm and he appeared to be completely weak and frail.

"Who asked for your help? Damn it!" Linghu Chong swore and then limped back into the cave.

"Hey, you just gained an entire day and night without any extra effort. Don't you think it was a bit despicable and shameless?" Feng Qingyang said with a smile.

"Well, when you are dealing with despicable and shameless people, I suppose a small despicable and shameless trick would be acceptable." Linghu Chong laughed.

"What if you are dealing with a gentleman?" Feng Qingyang asked with a serious face.

"A gentleman?" Linghu Chong was taken by surprise and became speechless.

"What are you going to do if you are dealing with a gentleman?" Feng Qingyang fixed his piercing eyes on Linghu Chong's face and asked coldly.

“Well, even though he is a gentleman, if he wants to kill me, I can’t just let him. When I have to, I guess I will have to use a little bit of the despicable and shameless tricks,” Linghu Chong answered.

Feng Qingyang was delighted beyond measurement. “Great! Great! If you can say that, then you are not a hypocrite who only pretends to do good,” he said loudly. “A true man does things to his own like, just like floating clouds and flowing water – natural and smooth, come and go freely. Rules of the Martial World or regulations of schools and clans are all complete bull!”

Linghu Chong let out a slight smile. Every word of Feng Qingyang had struck a chord in his heart and made him feel indescribable joy. But since Master had been repeatedly admonishing him that even if one had to give up his own life, he should never defame the great reputation of the Huashan Sword School by breaking school rules or violating regulations of the Martial World, he really couldn’t echo Grand Uncle-Master’s point publicly; besides, the words “hypocrite who only pretends to do good” seemed to be satirizing his Master’s nickname of “Gentleman Sword,” so he only let out a slight smile and didn’t chime in.

Feng Qingyang reached out with his wizened fingers and stroked Linghu Chong’s hair gently, a bright smile blossoming on his face.

“Among Yue Buqun’s apprentices, there are actually good talents like you. That chap does have some taste. He wasn’t a complete loser.” The “chap” he had mentioned of course meant Yue Buqun.

“Kid, you really suit my taste. Come on, let’s practice some more of Great Hero Dugu’s first sword stance and the third sword stance.” Feng Qingyang patted on Linghu Chong’s shoulder.

Feng Qingyang went ahead and picked some key issues in the first sword stance of the Dugu Nine Swords to explain to Linghu Chong. After Linghu Chong comprehended them,

he then explained in detail the related variations in the third sword stance with both words and gestures. There were some long swords in the back cave, so both of them used Huashan style long swords to demonstrate and perform. Linghu Chong memorized everything with all his heart, and every time when he had a question, he would ask it right away. Because they had plenty of time during the day, the learning process wasn't as intense as the night before, and each stance and variation could be explained and demonstrated in great details.

After dinner, Linghu Chong slept for four hours and then continued with the learning. The next morning, Tian Boguang was convinced that Linghu Chong had been injured pretty badly the previous day, so he didn't even press with his shouts outside this time. Linghu Chong was just happy that he could continue learning sword techniques at the back cave. By the time of about two o'clock in the afternoon, Linghu Chong had learned all the variations in the third sword stance of the Dugu Nine Swords completely.

"It's no big deal if you still can't beat him today. If you get to study for another day and night, I am sure you will win tomorrow no matter what," Feng Qingyang declared.

Linghu Chong nodded and then walked out of the cave slowly with the long sword left by a senior grandmaster of the Huashan Sword School in hand. When he saw Tian Boguang looking into the distance from the edge of the cliff, he put on a pretended surprised face.

"Why, brother Tian? How come you are still here?"

"I am waiting for you. Sorry about the offense yesterday. Are you feeling better today?"

"I didn't see anything getting better. The wound on my leg from your knife chop is still hurting really badly."

"Ha-ha, that day when we fought in Hengyang Town, your wounds were a lot more severe than today, yet you never said anything to give the impression of weakness. I know you have a whole bag of tricks. When you strike a pose to show



your weakness, you probably are thinking about a surprise attack. I am not going to fall for it," Tian Boguang said with a smile.

"You have already fallen for it. Even if you can figure it out right now, it would still be too late!" Linghu Chong's face split into a big smile. "Brother Tian, look out!"

At the exact moment of his last word, Linghu Chong thrust his sword at Tian Boguang's chest. Tian Boguang raised his knife hurriedly to parry it, but his knife hit nothing. Meanwhile, Linghu Chong's second thrust had arrived.

"Excellent speed!" Tian Boguang praised as he crossed his knife to block the attack, but Linghu Chong had already launched his third and forth thrusts.

"I've got some even faster ones," Linghu Chong declared.

He immediately thrust out the fifth and the sixth attacks. Once he started his attacks, each thrust was followed by another continuous thrust, and each thrust was faster than the previous one. He had really grasped the essence of the Dugu Nine Swords - once stepping in, never step back, and every thrust is an attack.

After ten moves or so, Tian Boguang became terror-stricken. He had no clue how to fend off the endless of attacks. Every time when Linghu Chong lunge a thrust, he would take a step back. After another ten thrusts, he had retreated to the very brink of the cliff. Linghu Chong didn't slow down his attack one bit and with four whistling sounds, he lunged another four thrusts, all of which pointing at Tian Boguang's vital parts. Tian Boguang worked his best and parried two of the thrusts away, but could not fend off the third thrust in any way. He stepped back with his left foot but his foot only landed on emptiness. He knew clearly that it was a bottomless abyss behind him and anyone falling down it would be smashed into pieces. At the critical moment, he chopped down at the ground with all his strength and was able to stable himself right on the edge. By then, the fourth

thrust from Linghu Chong had arrived and the tip of the sword stopped inches short from his throat.

Tian Boguang's face was as white as a sheet of paper. Linghu Chong didn't let out a sound either and simply remained still with the sword tip right next to Tian's throat.

"Go ahead and kill me. What are you waiting for?" Tian Boguang yelled angrily after a long silence.

Linghu Chong pulled his right hand back and leapt several big steps backward.

"Brother Tian, you just had an oversight and permitted me to take the initiative. This one doesn't count. Let's fight again," he said.

Tian Boguang let out a loud snort and then waved his knife madly in a thunderstorm-like attack toward Linghu Chong.

"I'll attack first this time. I am not going to let you take advantage again," he shouted.

Seeing the fierce chop of the steel blade coming toward him, Linghu Chong jabbed his sword in an angle toward Tian Boguang's lower stomach while turning his upper body to dodge away from the sharp knife blade.

Realizing that Linghu Chong's thrust was quickly approaching him, Tian Boguang hurriedly turned his knife around and smacked it toward Linghu Chong's sword. Relying on his own exceptional strength, he thought that as soon as the knife and the sword collided, for sure he would be able to knock the long sword out of Linghu Chong's grip.

With the first thrust Linghu Chong was already able to take on the initiative. The second and the third thrust shot out continuously. Each thrust was accurate and effective, and his sword tip was never a second apart from his opponent's vital parts.

Tian Boguang didn't have enough time to parry off the attacks and had to take one step back after another. Who would have expected that after ten moves or so, he actually

followed the same old disastrous road and once again retreated to the very edge of the cliff?

Linghu Chong slashed down with his sword and forced Tian Boguang to wave his knife down to guard his lower portion body. At the meantime he reached out with his left hand and struck out in a claw hand. The claw hand struck with perfect timing and broke through from a flaw in Tian Boguang's defense line. Linghu Chong held the claw hand still, when his fingers were only two inches from Tian Boguang's Tan-Zhong Acupoint on his chest. He had sealed Tian Boguang's Tan-Zhong Acupoint twice before. Tian Boguang knew very well, that if Linghu Chong had struck out with his claw hand, he would have collapsed and his body would have fallen into the bottomless abyss this time instead of falling onto the ground. When Linghu Chong held his hand still, he was obviously giving ground.

The two both stayed still for a brief moment before Linghu Chong once again leapt back to yield.

Tian Boguang sat on a rock and meditated a short while with his eyes shut. Suddenly he shouted a loud roar as he launched his attack, chopping down vertically with mighty force. This time he took the surroundings into consideration and made sure his back was facing the mountain. He figured that even if he were forced into retreat, he would end up retreating into the cave. And without worrying about falling down the cliff, he could really fight it out.

By now Linghu Chong had a good grasp of the various variations in Tian Boguang's knife moves. When Tian's chop came, he dodged to the right, and at the meantime, slashed his long sword toward Tian Boguang's left shoulder. Tian Boguang circled his knife back to block, but Linghu Chong had already retracted his sword and thrust it at his left waist. Tian Boguang's left arm was only less than a foot away from his left waist. When he had circled his knife back, he was actually defending and launching a counter-attack at the same time, and to be able to execute his counter-attack, he

had attached much strength with the move, which sent the knife chopping out. In a hurry, he didn't have enough time to pull his knife back to guard his waist, so with no other choice, he took a half step to his right. Linghu Chong threw another thrust at Tian's right cheek. Tian Boguang hurriedly raised his knife to block when Linghu Chong's sword suddenly pointed at his left leg. Not able to block this one in time, either, Tian Boguang had to take another step to his right.

Linghu Chong continued with endless thrusts, all of which aimed at Tian Boguang's left side and forced him to retreat to his right one step after another. After about ten steps, Tian Boguang found himself near the end of the cliff where a big rock blocked his retreating route. Leaning his back against the rock wall, Tian Boguang simply waved his knife all around himself and paid no attention to how Linghu Chong might thrust his sword out. Tearing sounds came into his ears continuously as Linghu Chong's sword slashed six times on his left sleeve, left side of the robe, and the left leg of his pants. The entire six slashes only left cuts on his clothing without really touching his skin. Tian Boguang knew too well that any one of the six slashes could have cut his belly open or cut off his arm and leg. In the instant, Tian Boguang felt so disheartened and dispirited that it seemed as if all his hopes had died out. In unspeakable despair, he spewed out a mouthful of blood.

Within the short moment, Linghu Chong had succeeded in forcing Tian Boguang to the very edge between life and death three times in a roll. Linghu Chong almost couldn't believe it, himself. Just a few days ago, his opponent still had much superior Kung Fu than him, yet right now he had taken the lead and had his opponent completely in his power. He had won so easily that he didn't even have to use all his strength. Although he maintained his composure, deep in his heart, he was really enlightened beyond words. By the time Tian Boguang spurted out a mouthful of blood after the crushing defeat, remorse welled up in Linghu Chong's heart.

"Brother Tian," he said, "victories and defeats are normal and common. Why are you taking it so hard? Didn't I lose to you many times before?"

Tian Boguang threw his knife down and shook his head. "Senior grandmaster Feng has miraculous sword skills. No one will be a match for him in the entire world. I will never be a match for you again."

"Brother Tian, you said it right. It was all because of Grand Uncle-Master Feng's great advice, I was able to gain victory." Linghu Chong picked up the knife and handed it back respectfully with both hands. "Grand Uncle-Master Feng hopes that you can grant him a request."

"My life is at your mercy, what's there to talk about?" Tian Boguang didn't take the knife and mocked in a sad tone.

"Grand Uncle-Master has withdrawn from society and lived a hermit's life for many years. He prefers not to be disturbed by vulgar people. When you, brother Tian, leaves Mount Huashan, would you please not mention the respectful Grand Uncle-Master's name to anyone? I would really appreciate that," Linghu Chong said.

"Why don't you just stab me with your sword to rid the witness? Wouldn't that be a lot easier?" Tian Boguang mocked coldly.

Linghu Chong took two steps back and slid his sword back to the sheath.

"Brother Tian, earlier when your Kung Fu skills were way ahead of mine, you could have whacked me with a single chop, and then this would never have happened. I am only asking a favor from you to not tell anyone else the whereabouts of my Grand Uncle-Master Feng. I dare not to mean any intimidation or offense," he explained sincerely.

"Fine. I won't." Tian Boguang agreed.

"Many thanks to you, brother Tian!" Linghu Chong bowed deeply down.

"I have come to invite you down Mount Huashan as instructed. I guess that's not going to work now, but we are

not done yet. I probably will never be able to beat you in a fight again in this life. I am not giving up though. This concerns my own life, so I would have no choice but to keep pestering you. You can't blame me for not being a true man. Brother Linghu, farewell for now." At the last word, Tian Boguang cupped his hands with a salute and then walked off.

Linghu Chong remembered the deadly poison that was planted in Tian Boguang's body. After Tian left Mount Huashan, the poison would soon become active and kill him. After so many fierce fights with him, Linghu Chong felt as if they were much closer unwittingly. He almost called out with an impulse, "I'll go with you." Then he remembered that he was still being punished on the "Cliff of Contemplation", and without Master's permission, he was not allowed to even take a step off the cliff. Besides, Tian was a rapist who did all kinds of evil. If he had left together with Tian, wouldn't he be wallowing in the mire with Tian? That would surely bring disgrace and ruin upon him and lead to endless trouble. With those thoughts, he held the words back and simply looked on as Tian Boguang descended down the path.

Linghu Chong went back into the cave and bowed down to the ground.

"Grand Uncle-Master, you not only saved my life, but also taught me superb sword techniques. How can I ever repay you for the kindness and grace?"

"Superb sword techniques, superb sword techniques! Hmm, it's still far from that." Feng Qingyang let out a smile, yet the smile was really in a mood of loneliness and depression.

"May I make bold to ask Grand Uncle-Master to teach me all of the Dugu Nine Swords techniques?" Linghu Chong pleaded.

"Are you sure you won't regret it later for learning the Dugu Nine Swords?" Feng Qingyang asked.

Linghu Chong was confused for a moment, thinking that why would he regret it later, then he quickly found an answer

and thought, "I see. The Dugu Nine Swords are not sword techniques from our own school. Grand Uncle-Master meant that Master might not approve it and punish me once he finds out about it. But Master never restricts me from learning other school's techniques for references. He has said before that stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade on this one - advice from others may help one overcome one's shortcomings. Besides, I have already learned many Heng-Shan, Hengshan, Taishan, and Songshan Sword Schools' sword moves from the drawings on the rock wall. I even learned some Demon Cult Ten Elders' Kung Fu. The Dugu Nine Swords Kung Fu is so magnificent. It is the kind of unraveled skill that us martial arts practitioner would crave about even in our dreams. I am really very lucky to have a senior grandmaster in our school who is willing to teach it to me."

"This is the most fortunate thing in my entire life. I would only feel grateful, never regrets," he said as he knelt down.

"Very well, I will teach you then. If I don't teach the Dugu Nine Swords to you, there probably wouldn't be Dugu Nine Swords left in this world a few years from now," Feng Qingyang said with a smile.

For a moment, his face showed traces of great delight, but soon they were replaced with a dreary expression. After a long pause, he finally continued.

"Tian Boguang definitely won't just give up so easy. Even if he decides to come back again, it's going to be at least ten to fifteen days from now. Your Kung Fu is already better than his, and you certainly have more tricks than he does. I don't think you'll ever be afraid of him again. We have plenty of time now, so you must study from the very beginning to ensure a solid foundation."

This time Feng Qingyang went through the script of the General Index Stance, the first stance of the Dugu Nine Swords, one sentence at a time, and explained in great details bundled with various variations that were

implementations of the script. Linghu Chong had simply memorized the script by ear without understanding most of the ideas and theories behind it. Now with Feng Qingyang's calm and unhurried explanation, he was able to comprehend many principles of advanced-level Kung Fu and several brilliant and profound variations every moment of it. He couldn't help but show his great happiness and great admiration throughout the time.

The old and the young went over the brilliant sword techniques in the Dugu Nine Swords atop the "Cliff of Contemplation." They started from General Index Stance and went on with Sword-breaking Stance, Knife-breaking Stance, Spear-breaking Stance, Mace-breaking Stance, Whip-breaking Stance, Palm-breaking Stance, and Missile-breaking Stance all the way till the ninth stance, Energy-breaking Stance.

The Spear-breaking Stance included techniques to overcome long weapons such as long-handled spear, long-handled halberd, snake-shaped spear, staff, fanged cudgel, white wax stick, Buddhist monk's staff, and Buddhist monk's spade.

The Mace-breaking Stance was used to overcome short weapons such as steel club, iron mace, acupoint-sealing peg, crutches, Emei<sup>61</sup> sting, dagger, war axe, iron plate, octagonal hammer, and iron awl.

The Whip-breaking stance was able to overcome flexible weapons such as long cord, whip, three-sectioned staff, chain spear, iron chain, fishing net, and meteor hammer.

Although each move was just one stance, it had endless variations. The more Linghu Chong learned, the more powerful it became when he comprehended the connections between each stance. The last three stances were the most difficult ones.

The Palm-breaking Stance overcame Kung Fu skills related to one's fists, legs, fingers, and palms. If the opponent were brave enough to fight against a sword with



bare hands, he had to have superb Kung Fu skills and that using a weapon or not was really no difference for him any more. There are many fist forms, leg forms, finger forms, and palm forms in the world, and all of them are very complex. The Palm-breaking Stance included techniques to overcome boxing and grappling, joint manipulation and acupoint sealing, demon claw and tiger claw hands, iron sand divine palm, and the type of barehanded Kung Fu skills.

The word “Missile” in the name of the Missile-breaking Stance included the many different kinds of missiles and projectiles. To be able to learn this stance, the practitioner must first learn the skill of distinguishing the type of the missile by ear. He not only should be capable of blocking the many kinds of missiles coming from the enemy with his long sword, but also redirecting the force in the missiles to send them back and injure the enemy with his own missiles.

When it came to the ninth stance, Energy-breaking Stance, Feng Qingyang only taught Linghu Chong the script and formula of how to practice it.

Feng Qingyang explained, “This stance is used to overcome opponents who have great inner energy. The essence of the move really depends on your own interpretation. When senior master Dugu took on the entire Martial World with this set of Dugu Nine Swords many years ago, he couldn’t even find a single person that could defeat him, that was all because he had reached the acme of perfection with the set of sword techniques. The same sword technique from the same Huashan style sword art could have very different effect and power. It’s the same with the Dugu Nine Swords. Even though you have learned the sword techniques, if you can’t perfect your skills, you would still be no match for first-class elite fighters in today’s world. You have already entered the field. If you prefer to win than lose, go practice hard for another twenty years, then you will be capable of competing with the key players in the world.”

The more Linghu Chong studied, the more he realized that there were endless variations in the nine stances, and it will take a very long time for him to actually probe all the profound knowledge in them. When he heard his Grand Uncle-Master saying that he still needed to work hard on practicing the sword techniques for at least twenty more years, he wasn't surprised at all.

"If I'm able to fully understand the idea left by senior master Dugu when he created the nine stances of Dugu Nine Swords, I would be overjoyed," he said.

"You don't have to unduly humble yourself. Great Master Dugu was one with extraordinary intelligence. To be able to master his sword techniques, the key lies on the word 'comprehension,' not simply memorizing mechanically. Once you understand the essence of the sword techniques, you can use it anyway you want. Even if you have forgotten all the variations completely, it wouldn't matter anyway. And when you are in a real fight, the more you forget about them, the less you will be restricted by the original sword stances. You are good Kung Fu material, just the right kind to learn this set of sword techniques. Humph, in today's world, I doubt that there's really any extraordinary hero out there. You should remain diligent in your studies. I am leaving now," Feng Qingyang said.

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. "Grand Uncle-Master, where...where are you going?" his voice quivering, he asked anxiously.

"I have been living by the back side of Mount Huashan for decades. I just had a sudden impulse earlier and came out of my cave to teach you the set of sword techniques, hoping that senior master Dugu's unrivalled and superb Kung Fu wouldn't get rotten together with me. Of course it's time to go back now," Feng Qingyang said.

"Grand Uncle-Master, so you live right by the back side of the mountain. That's wonderful! I can serve upon you days

and nights to help rid your lonesomeness,” Linghu Chong said happily.

“Starting from now on, I will never see anyone from the Huashan Sword School. Even you are not an exception,” Feng Qingyang said sternly.

Seeing the frightened and confused look on Linghu Chong’s face, he changed into a softer tone.

“Chong, fate brought us together, and you are very to my liking. I am truly very delighted to have you, such a wonderful boy, to carry on my sword techniques in my old age. If you still think I am your Grand Uncle-Master, then don’t come looking for me to make things difficult.”

“Grand Uncle-Master, why?” Linghu Chong felt great sorrow in his heart.

“Don’t even tell your Master that you have seen me.” Feng Qingyang shook his head.

“I will follow your instructions,” Linghu Chong said as a tear started to emerge in his eyes.

“Good kid, good kid!” Feng Qingyang stroked Linghu Chong’s head gently and then turned around to go down the cliff.

Linghu Chong followed him all the way till the edge of the cliff. Seeing Feng Qingyang’s thin figure receding down the cliff and eventually disappearing in the back mountain, he couldn’t help but feel deep sorrow and grief.

During the ten days or so Linghu Chong spent with Feng Qingyang, even though all they discussed about were sword techniques, he admired Feng Qingyang’s demeanor with all his heart. On top of that, he also felt that Feng seemed to be so close to him and the two were indescribably congenial. Feng Qingyang was really a Grand Uncle-Master of his who was two generations higher than him, yet deep inside Linghu Chong’s heart, he vaguely felt a kind of affection as if Feng was a good friend in his same age group who he had wished to meet all along. Comparing to his relationship to his

respectful Master, Yue Buqun, this one seemed to be much closer instead.

“When this Grand Uncle-Master was still young, he probably had the same kind of temper just like me, fearing nothing, carefree, and tending to do things following one’s free will,” Linghu Chong thought. “When he taught me sword techniques, he always liked to say that ‘it’s the person using the sword techniques, not the sword techniques using the person’ and ‘a person is alive, but sword techniques are not, so an alive person shouldn’t be restrained by dead sword techniques.’ That principle is so true. Why did Master never say anything close to that?” He pondered over it for a while and then got his own answer. “Of course Master knows about this principle. It’s just that he knows well that I am too carefree and is afraid that once he tells me the principle, I would go on wild imaginations to create a mass and won’t follow the rules step by step when I practice sword art. Once I get to a certain level with my sword skills, Master will then explain everything in details. Apprentice brothers and sisters aren’t there with their level of Kung Fu skills, so of course it would be even more difficult for them to understand the principle of advanced sword art. It would be a waste of time telling them.” Then his mind slipped into a different thought. “Grand Uncle-Master’s sword skill has really reached the acme of perfection. What a pity it is that he never showed his true skills so I could broaden my horizons. Compared to Master, Grand Uncle Master’s sword skill must be another level up.”

He remembered that Feng Qingyang’s face was always covered by depression. He figured, “During the last ten days or so, Grand Uncle-Master would occasionally heave deep sighs. Obviously he had some kind of a big tragedy in his mind. I wonder what happened to him.” He heaved a sigh himself and then went out the cave to practice.

He practiced for a while and then randomly threw out a thrust. It turned out to be the Graceful Phoenix move from

Huashan style sword art. He paused for a second and shook his head in a wry smile.

“Wrong!” he said to himself and then continued on. Not long after, he threw out another random thrust, and it turned out to be Graceful Phoenix once again. He couldn’t help but get mad at himself.

“Because I know sword moves from our sword school very well, and all those moves are already deep-rooted in my mind, as soon as I become careless, I would naturally add the familiar moves from our school into it. Then it’s not Dugu Nine Swords anymore.”

Suddenly a thought flashed by his mind. “Grand Uncle-Master told me to have no restraints and follow the natural flow, then why couldn’t I use sword moves from my own school? And furthermore, why couldn’t I add Hengshan, Taishan, or other schools’ sword moves, or even Demon Cult Ten Elders’ Kung Fu into it? If I insisted on separating them, using only certain type of sword art, not another certain type of sword art, then I am really putting restraints onto myself.”

After figuring that out, he just randomly threw out different moves. If it followed the natural flow, he would mix sword moves from his own school or moves from the rock wall together. Instantly, he felt endless fun. The sword moves from the five different mountain sword schools were quite different from each other, and the ten Demon Cult Elders also came from six or seven different sects. It was almost impossible to mix moves from so many different styles. After practicing for some moments, he was still not able to merge them together.

“If I can’t merge them together, so what? Why do I have to?” he suddenly realized. So he stopped worrying about what move it was and as soon as he thought of a move, he would simply mix it into the Dugu Nine Swords as he pleased. However, out of all those moves, Graceful Phoenix was still the one he used the most. He practiced some more and then threw another random thrust. Not to his surprise, it was Graceful Phoenix once again.

“What might little apprentice sister say once she sees how I am executing that Graceful Phoenix?” he suddenly thought.

He held his sword still as a gentle and soft smile broke out on his face. During the last few days, he had been studying and practicing sword arts with all his heart, even in his dreams he had been only thinking about the various variations of the Dugu Nine Swords. Now when he suddenly remembered Yue Lingshan, lovesick quickly welled up in his heart.

“I wonder if she is still teaching apprentice brother Lin sword art secretly. Master has strict orders, but little apprentice sister has always been very bold. Relying on Master-Wife’s spoiling, she probably started teaching again. Even if she’s not teaching sword art, they see each other days and nights, so of course they will become even closer.”

Gradually, the gentle smile changed into a wry smile, and eventually there was not a trace of happiness left on his face. Feeling quite depressed, he slid his sword back into the sheath slowly.

Suddenly Lu Dayou’s shouting voice rose. “Big apprentice brother! Big apprentice brother!” His voice was filled with worry.

“Oh no! Tian Boguang went down the cliff after a crushing defeat. He had said that he was not going to give up and would keep pestering to the very end. Could it be that since he can’t beat me in a fight, he had taken little apprentice sister into hostage so he could force me to surrender?” Linghu Chong was stunned.

He rushed by the edge of the cliff and looked down. Flustered and exasperated, Lu Dayou ran toward the cliff, the food basket in his hands.

“Big...big apprentice brother...big...apprentice brother, this is not good!” Lu Dayou shouted.

“What? What happened to little apprentice sister?” Linghu Chong asked hurriedly, even more worried.

Lu Dayou jumped up the cliff, and after sitting the food basket on a big rock, he said, "Little apprentice sister? Little apprentice sister is just fine. This is terrible. I think it's going to be trouble."

Hearing that little apprentice sister was just fine, Linghu Chong felt quite relieved. "What trouble?" he asked.

"Master and Master-Wife came back." Lu Dayou panted.

Linghu Chong was quite delighted. "Bah! Isn't it a great thing that Master and Master-Wife have come back? Why are you saying that it's going to be trouble? Nonsense!" he reproached.

"No, no, you don't understand. Right after Master and Master-Wife came back, before they even had a chance to rest, many people came to pay a visit, and among the people coming, there are ones from the Songshan Sword School, the Hengshan Sword School, and the Taishan Sword School," Lu Dayou explained.

"Our five sword schools are all members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. It's quite normal when people from the Songshan Sword School and the others come to pay a visit to Master," Linghu Chong said.

"No, no...you don't know. There are three others that came together with them and claimed to be part of our Huashan Sword School, but Master doesn't call them apprentice brothers."

"Really? What do those three look like?" Linghu Chong asked, feeling slightly surprised.

"One of them has a yellowish face and claimed to have a surname of Feng,<sup>62</sup> and called something like Feng Buping. Then another one is a Taoist priest; the third one is a short guy. Both of them are called 'Bu' something. I guess they are really ones in the 'Bu' class."

"Maybe they are traitors of our school and had been expelled out of the school a long time ago." Linghu Chong nodded.

“Yeah! You guessed it right. As soon as Master saw them, he became very displeased and said to them, ‘Brother Feng, all three of you have had your connection with Huashan Sword School dropped a long time ago. Why are you coming back to Mount Huashan again?’ Then that Feng Buping said, ‘Apprentice brother Yue, did you buy out Mount Huashan? Are you not allowing other people to come up Mount Huashan? Or did the Emperor grant it to you?’ Master snorted and then said, ‘If you are just touring around Mount Huashan, of course you have your freedom. Yue Buqun is no longer your apprentice brother. I’ll have to send the words ‘apprentice brother Yue’ right back to you.’ Feng Buping said, ‘Your Master used schemes and intrigues to seize control of the Huashan Sword School many years ago. We’ll have to square the old accounts today. You don’t want me to call you ‘apprentice brother Yue.’ Humph, after we square the old accounts, even if you kneel in front of me to beg for it, I wouldn’t grant you the wish.’”

“Oh,” Linghu Chong replied, thinking that Master really had trouble this time.

“Us apprentices all got angry at those words.” Lu Dayou continued. “Little apprentice sister was the first one to yell out. Who would have thought that Master-Wife had a real soft temper this time? She didn’t allow little apprentice sister to make any noises. Master obviously didn’t take them too seriously. He said dryly, ‘You want to square accounts? What accounts do you want to square? How do you want to square?’ Feng Buping said loudly, ‘You have usurped the Head Master post of the Huashan Sword School for over twenty years. Haven’t you had enough of it already? Don’t you think it’s time to step down now?’ Master answered with a smile, ‘So all of you took on all the trouble to line up here just so that you can seize my post of Head Master. What’s there to cherish? Brother Feng, if you think you are capable of the Head Master post, of course I can step aside.’ Feng Buping said, ‘Your Master usurped our sword school’s Head



Master post using schemes and intrigues many years ago. I have already petitioned to the Five Mountains Sword Alliance Chief Zuo and received the Command Flag to become the new Head Master of the Huashan Sword School in his command.' He took out a small flag from his chest pocket and extended it out. It is indeed the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance."

"Isn't Alliance Chief Zuo a bit too impetuous to think he has the authority here? This is an internal affair of the Huashan Sword School. We don't need him to poke his nose in that matter. What right has him to decide who should be the Head Master of our Huashan Sword School?" Linghu Chong shouted angrily.

"That's right! Master-Wife said the same thing. But that Lu-named old guy from the Songshan Sword School, Crane Hands Lu Bai, you know, the old folk we saw at Uncle-Master Liu's house in Hengshan, he spared no effort backing up that Feng Buping saying that the Feng-named guy should become the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School and argued again and again with Master-Wife. And those two guys from the Taishan Sword School and the Hengshan Sword School, this is so annoying, also ganged up with Feng Buping. The three schools of theirs have decided to gang up to give trouble to our Huashan Sword School. Heng-Shan Sword School is the only one that doesn't have anyone involved. Big...big apprentice brother, I figured this is going to be big trouble, that's why I came in a rush to let you know."

"When our school has trouble, as long as us apprentices can still breathe, we are all willing to die for Master. Six apprentice brother, let's go!" Linghu Chong shouted.

"Right! When Master sees that you are working for him, for sure he won't blame you for leaving the cliff without permission," Lu Dayou exclaimed.

"It's alright even if Master do blame me. Master is a courteous gentleman, and he doesn't like to argue with

others. Maybe he will actually let someone have the post of Head Master. Wouldn't that be terrible...?" Linghu Chong started rushing down the cliff using his Qing-Gong.

In the middle of running, Linghu Chong suddenly heard somebody shouting from the mountain path in front of him.

"Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! Where are you?"

"Who is calling my name?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Are you Linghu Chong?" several voices asked in unison.

"That's right!" Linghu Chong answered.

Suddenly two shadows flashed by and blocked in the middle of the road. The mountain path was very narrow and on one side of the path was the ten-thousand-feet deep bottomless valley. When the two men showed up so abruptly on the mountain path all of a sudden, Linghu Chong was in the middle of a fast dash and almost bumped into them. He stopped abruptly and found himself only a foot away from the two. The two faces were both very bumpy and wrinkly and looked very frightening. In great surprise, Linghu Chong immediately turned around and leapt back ten feet or so, shouting, "Who are you?" But to his great astonishment, he found another two extremely ugly faces, also bumpy and wrinkly, blocking his way. The two faces were less than half-a-foot from his face, and their noses almost touched his nose. Linghu Chong immediately took a step to his side and again found two more people standing by his side between him and the bottomless abyss. Their faces were also very similar to the previous four.

Having bumped into six freaks all of a sudden, Linghu Chong was at a loss as what to do, and his heart pounded like a drum. Within the split of a second, the six freaks had jostled him into a three-inch wide small space. The breaths of the two in front of him had already reached his face. He could also feel warm air on his back neck. Apparently it was because of the breathing from the two behind him. In a hurry, he reached for his sword. However, as soon as his finger touched the handle of the sword, the six freaks took a

half step forward all at the same time and jostled with their bodies toward the middle. Instantly, Linghu Chong was squeezed into such a tight space that he couldn't even move an inch.

"Hey, hey! What are you guys doing?" Lu Dayou's voice rose from behind him.

Even though Linghu Chong had a bag full of tricks, at the moment, he was scared out of wits. Those six freaks looked almost like trolls or monsters, and not only did they have scary looks, their behaviors were even more freaky. Linghu Chong tried hard to open his arms so he could push away the two in front of him, but with his arms being jostled down, he had no way of pushing.

"They must be villains together with Feng Buping's group," he thought to himself hurriedly.

His entire body felt the great pressure; he couldn't even breathe. The four freaks kept jostling toward the middle and soon Linghu Chong's joints started popping. Not daring to stare right into the eyes of the freak right in front of him, Linghu Chong quickly shut his eyes tight. Then he heard a screeching voice.

"Linghu Chong, we'll take you to see the little nun."

"Oh, no! So they are Tian Boguang's gang." Linghu Chong thought to himself.

"If you don't let go of me, I'll commit suicide with my sword! Linghu Chong would rather die...!" he shouted.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong felt two hands grabbing onto both of his arms. The grips were as tight as clamps. Even though he had learned the Dugu Nine Swords, he had no means of using it at all. He groaned inwardly.

"The good little nun wants to see you. Behave yourself. Be a good kid, too," another voice rose.

"It would not be good if you become dead. If you commit suicide, I'll beat you half dead half alive," a third one said.

"He would be completely dead already. Why would you still beat him half dead half alive?" someone else argued.

"If you want to scare him, don't let him hear you. Once he hears it, he won't fall for it," another one commented.

"I just like to scare him, what are you gonna do about it?" the previous one mocked.

"I think it's better to talk him into behaving himself," another one suggested.

"I said to scare him, and I will scare him," the previous one said.

"I like to talk him out of it," that another one insisted.

The two actually went on arguing against each other nonstop.

Linghu Chong listened as the two argued foolishly. He was both greatly shocked and annoyed. He thought to himself, "The six freaks have very high Kung Fu skills, however, they seemed to be really stupid." So he shouted, "It's useless to try to scare me or talk me out of it. If you don't let go of me, I'll bite off my tongue and kill myself."

Suddenly, great pain came from his cheeks. Someone had grabbed onto his jaw.

"This guy is really stubborn. If he bites off his tongue, he won't be able to talk. The little nun won't like that for sure," one voice said.

"If he bites off his tongue, he would be dead. Why would it matter if he can still talk or not?" another one argued.

"He might not die. If you don't believe me, you can bite your own to try it out," a third one suggested.

"I said he would die, so I won't bite off my own tongue. Why don't you try it out?" the previous one mocked.

"Why should I bite my own tongue off? I got it. Let him try it," the one spoke before him replied.

There came a loud cry from Lu Dayou. Apparently those freaks had captured him.

"You, bite off your own tongue and let's see if you will die or not? Hurry up! Bite!" one freak yelled.

"I won't! If I bite my tongue off, I'd be dead for sure," Lu Dayou shouted.

"That's right! If one bites his tongue off, he would be dead for sure! Even he said so too," one of the freaks said.

"He's not dead yet. His words are not dependable," another one argued.

"He didn't bite off his tongue, so of course he won't die. If he did, he would die!" a third one commented.

Linghu Chong gathered his strength and jerked his arms abruptly. Instantly the pain from his wrists went deep into his marrow, yet he was still not even able to move a single bit. In the instant, he suddenly hit upon a way out of the trouble. He let out a loud scream and then pretended to be out cold. The six freaks all cried out in surprise. The one who grabbed at Linghu Chong's cheeks immediately let go of them.

"He was scared to death!" a freak commented.

"He can't be scared to death. He's not that big of a loser," another one disagreed.

"Even if he's dead, he wasn't scared to death," a third one suggested.

"Then how did he die?" the previous one asked.

Lu Dayou actually believed that they had tortured big apprentice brother to death and burst into a loud cry.

"I think he was scared to death," a freak insisted.

"You grabbed him too hard. He was grabbed to death," another one suggested.

"How on earth did he die?" a third one questioned.

"I shut down my arteries and killed myself!" Linghu Chong shouted loudly.

The six freaks were shocked when they suddenly heard Linghu Chong talking, then they all broke into loud laughs and said, "Aha, he's not dead. He was pretending to be dead."

"I wasn't pretending. After I died I came back to life again," Linghu Chong claimed.

"Do you really know how to shut down your arteries? That must be a very difficult Kung Fu. Will you teach me?" a freak asked.

"The Shut Down Your Own Arteries Kung Fu is very advanced. This dude doesn't know it. He's lying to you," another freak said.

"Did you say I don't know it? If I don't know it, how could I have shut down my arteries and killed myself earlier?" Linghu Chong challenged.

"Well...well...that's really odd." The freak scratched his head and didn't know how to answer.

Linghu Chong now was sure that even though the six freaks had excellent Kung Fu skills, their brains were certainly dull-witted to the extreme. So he said, "If you don't let go of me, I am going to shut down my arteries again. After I die this time, I won't be able to come back to life any more."

The two freaks that had been grabbing onto Linghu Chong's wrists tightly immediately let go of him and said in unison, "You can't die. If you die, it would be terrible."

"Well, if you don't want me dead, you'll have to move aside and let me through. I got to take care of some important business," Linghu Chong suggested.

The two freaks blocking his way shook their heads at the same time, both to the left and then both to the right. "No way! No way! You have to come with us to see the little nun," they said in unison.

Linghu Chong gathered his inner energy and jumped up, hoping to be able to jump over the two freaks' heads. But to his surprise, the two freaks also jumped up in great speed and their two bodies made a flying wall that blocked Linghu Chong's path again. Linghu Chong's body bumped with the two freaks' bodies and fell back down to the ground.

While still in mid-air, Linghu Chong had already grabbed hold of his sword handle. He waved his arm to draw his sword, but suddenly felt great burdens on both of his shoulders. The two freaks behind him had each reached out with an arm and placed a hand on each of his shoulders. His sword was only about a foot out of the sheath and he simply could not draw it out. The two hands on his shoulders each

seemed to have weighed hundreds of pounds. His body was immediately pushed lower. He couldn't even stand straight, not mentioning drawing his sword.

"Let's carry him away!" after the two freaks pushed him down onto the ground, they suggested with big smiles.

The two freaks in front of Linghu Chong each reached out with a hand to grab onto his ankles and picked him off the ground.

"Hey! Hey! What are you doing?" Lu Dayou shouted.

"This chap is so annoying. Let's kill him!" a freak suggested and raised his palm high, ready to strike down onto Lu Dayou's head.

"Don't kill him! Don't kill him!" Linghu Chong cried out loudly.

"Alright, I'll listen to you. I won't kill him. I'll seal his Mute Acupoint instead," that freak replied. He didn't even bother turning around and simply pointed backward with his finger. In a whistling sound, he had sealed Lu Dayou's Mute Acupoint with a beam of energy. Lu Dayou was in the middle of screaming, but the scream suddenly stopped abruptly as if someone had cut his scream off using a pair of scissors, and his body immediately huddled up.

Linghu Chong had rarely seen such accuracy and mighty power demonstrated in the freak's acupoint-sealing skills; he couldn't help but show great admiration.

"Excellent Kung Fu!" he praised.

The freak was greatly pleased. "This is nothing! I have a lot more cool Kung Fu skills. Let me demonstrate a few of them for you," he said with a big smile.

If it were in normal days, Linghu Chong would have wanted to broaden his horizons, but at the moment he really worried about his Master's safety and was very anxious.

"I don't want to watch!" he shouted.

"Why don't you want to watch? You'll have to watch!" the freak said angrily.

He jumped into the air and flew over Linghu Chong and the four freaks holding Linghu Chong like a big bird. His body maintained a horizontal position when he flew in the air and looked as if he was a swallow gliding in the air with beautiful postures.

“Beautiful!” Linghu Chong couldn’t help but blurt out another praise.

The freak landed back to the ground smoothly and gently, without even bringing up any dust. By the time he turned around, great smiles piled up on his long horsy face.

“This is really nothing! I’ve got a lot more even better than that,” he said happily.

He was at least somewhere close to sixty or seventy years old, yet his temper and the way he behaved was just like a little kid that wanted to keep showing off as soon as someone praised him. The superb and profound Kung Fu and the childish and naïve behavior of him happened to be on the exact opposite in extreme.

Linghu Chong thought, “Master and Master-Wife are in trouble right now surrounded by tough enemy. The enemy has all those Songshan Sword School, Taishan Sword School, and the bunch of elite fighters to back him, even if I go over there, the situation wouldn’t be approved much. Why don’t I trick these freaks into going over there to help Master and Master-Wife out?” So he shook his head and said, “You guys’ little Kung Fu is far from good enough to show off here on Mount Huashan.”

“Far from good enough? What are you talking about? You got caught by us, didn’t you?” that freak rebuffed.

“I am just a nobody in the Huashan Sword School. What’s so difficult to beat me? Right now, there are many elite master hands from Songshan Sword School, Taishan Sword School, Hengshan Sword School, and Huashan Sword School gathered here at Mount Huashan. Of course you guys wouldn’t be brave enough to go provoke them, would you?” Linghu Chong bluffed.



"Why would we be afraid to provoke them? Where are they?" the freak asked.

"We won the bet with that little nun, so the little nun asked us to come get Linghu Chong. She never asked us to provoke any elite master hands from the Songshan Sword School or the Taishan Sword School. We should only do one favor for one win. If we do too many favors, it's not worth it. Let's go," another one suggested.

Hearing those words, Linghu Chong felt very relieved. "It turned out that they were sent by little apprentice sister Yilin. Then they must not be enemies of mine. It seemed that they had lost a bet and thus had to come to get me. It's funny that they still want to save their faces and claim to have actually won the bet instead."

"That's a good idea," he said. "The elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School said that he looked down the most upon those six old freaks with horsy faces that looked like tangerine skins, and as soon as he sees the six of them, he would nip them dead one by one like nipping puny ants. Too bad that as soon as those six old freaks hear his voice, they all immediately ran far way and there was no way for him to find them."

At these words, the six freaks roared in great outrage. The four of them who had been carrying Linghu Chong sat him back down on the ground and then shouted all together.

"Where is this guy? Take us to him. We'd like a fight with him."

"What about the Songshan Sword School or the Taishan Sword School? Humph! Peach Valley's Six Fairies think nothing of them."

"Is he insane or something? How dare he nip Peach Valley's Six Fairies dead like nipping puny ants?"

"Well, you call yourselves Peach Valley's Six Fairies, but he kept on calling you Peach Valley's Six Trolls, or sometimes Peach Valley's Six Kids. I'd advise the Six Fairies of you to better stay as far away from him as possible. That guy's Kung

Fu is so vicious. You don't stand a chance fighting him," Linghu Chong added.

"No way! No way! Let's go fight him and see who's better," a freak shouted out.

"I think this doesn't look too good. If that elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School dares to say so, he must have superb skills to back himself up. He had called us Peach Valley's Six Kids, then he probably is a senior master of ours, and we probably can't beat him in a fight. The less trouble we have to deal with, the better. Why don't we go back now?" another freak suggested.

"Sixth brother has the least guts. We haven't even had the fight yet. How do you know we can't beat him?" another one exclaimed.

"What if he really can nip us dead like nipping ants? Wouldn't that be real bad luck? And after we fight him, we'd all be nipped dead already, how could we run away by then?" the coward freak asked.

"That's right!" Linghu Chong laughed out loud inwardly. "If you want to run away, you need to hurry up. If he gets the news and then comes after you, you won't have enough time to run away by then."

Hearing these words, the coward freak immediately started running. Only after a blurry flash, he had already vanished from everyone's sight.

"Wow, he's gotten really excellent Qing-Gong skills." Linghu Chong thought to himself in surprise.

"Sixth brother has no guts. It's alright that he ran away. We'll go fight that elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School," a freak proposed.

"Let's go! Let's go! Peach Valley's Six Fairies are undefeatable! Why would we be afraid of him?" the rest of the freaks all agreed.

"Hurry up and take us over there. Let's see how he'll nip us dead like nipping puny ants," a freak said as he patted on Linghu Chong's shoulder gently.

“Well, I can take you over, but as a true man, I, Linghu Chong, will never let others force me into doing things. I really resented it when I heard that Songshan Sword School elite master hand ridicule the six of you left and right. Also because I admired the superb Kung Fu of yours very much, that’s why I am volunteering to take you over there from a sense of justice so you can get even with him. If you force me to do this or that simply because you have more bodies here, I’ll never do it even if I have to die!” Linghu Chong announced.

“Great! You have quite some integrity and sharp eyes too to be able to see that the six brothers of us have superb Kung Fu skills. We brothers admire you too!” the five freaks all applauded.

“If so, I’d be glad to take you guys over there. When you see him, you must not speak or act irresponsibly, so people in the Martial World won’t hold you guys for ridicule and say that Peach Valley Six Fairies are naive, childish and lack common sense. You have to all listen to my instructions, otherwise, you will make me lose face greatly and we’ll all look stupid,” Linghu Chong said.

He was just testing water here. Who would have thought that the five freaks immediately agreed with no complaints whatsoever?

“That’s perfect! We can’t ever let others call us, Peach Valley’s Six Fairies, naive, childish and lack common sense!” the five of them answered in unison.

Apparently they have heard those words “naive, childish and lack common sense” many times already, and considered them very embarrassing comments. Linghu Chong’s words were almost like music to their ears.

“Good. Will you please follow me?” Linghu Chong nodded at them and then hurried down the mountain path.

The five freaks followed right behind Linghu Chong carrying Lu Dayou with them. Only after a couple of miles, they found the coward freak popping his head up and down

to peek out from behind a big rock. Linghu Chong figured that this one definitely needed some encouragement, so he said to him.

"That Songshan Sword School's old folk's Kung Fu is far from yours. You don't need to be afraid of him. We are going there to kick his ass. Why don't you come with us?"

"Great! I am going too!" the freak said with great joy. However, he immediately asked again, "Well, you said that his Kung Fu is far from mine. Is his Kung Fu far better than mine or far worse?" He was quite timid, so naturally he was very cautious.

"Of course yours is far better than his. When you were running earlier, I could tell that you have outstanding Qing-Gong skills. That old folk from the Songshan Sword School will never be able to keep up with you," Linghu Chong said with a grin.

That freak was very pleased and decided to join the group, walking next to Linghu Chong, but he still wasn't too sure about it, and asked, "What if he did catch up with me? What then?"

"I'll always be by your side, and if he ever dares to catch up with you, humph! Humph!" Linghu Chong pulled his sword half a foot out of the sheath and then snapped it back in with a forceful push. "I'll whack him with a single thrust!" he said.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Hey, you have to keep your words!" the freak said with great joy!

"Of course! If he can't keep up with you, then I don't need to kill him," Linghu Chong promised.

"Sure! If he can't keep up with me, then we'll let him go." The freak smiled happily.

Linghu Chong laughed hard inwardly. He thought to himself, "Once you start running, I am sure it wouldn't be an easy task to keep up with you!" He then figured, "These six old folks are unsophisticated and honest. They aren't bad

guys. It wouldn't be a bad idea to make acquaintances with them." So he spoke again.

"Six Fairies, your names have long resounded in my ears! Today I finally get to meet all of you. And sure enough, you all live up to your reputation. I was wondering what are the respectful names of the six of you?"

The six freaks had no idea that what Linghu Chong just said was totally illogical, and as soon as they heard him saying that their names had long resounded in his ears, all were wild with joy.

"I am the big brother. My name is Peachtree Root Fairy," one said.

"I am the second. My name is Peachtree Trunk Fairy," another one said.

"I am either the third or the fourth. My name is Peachtree Branch Fairy," a third one said. He pointed at a fourth one and said, "He is either the third or the fourth. His name is Peachtree Leaf Fairy."

"How come you don't even know if you are the third or the fourth yourselves?" Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

"It's not that we don't know. It's because my mom and dad forgot about it," Branch Fairy explained.

"When your mom and dad gave birth to you, if they forgot that they had ever given birth to you, as a little kid, how would you know if there's a you in the world?" Leaf Fairy interrupted.

"Right! Right! Luckily my parents remembered that they gave birth to me." Linghu Chong nodded while working hard to hold his laugh.

"Here you go!" Leaf Fairy said.

"So how did your parents forget about it?" Linghu Chong asked.

"At the time when Mom and Dad gave birth to us, the two brothers, they remembered who was the elder one and who was the younger one, however, they forgot about it a few years later. That's why we don't really know who is the third

and who is the fourth,” Leaf Fairy said. He pointed at Branch Fairy and said, “He really wanted to be the third, and if I don’t call him third brother, he would start a fist fight with me. So I had to let him have it.”

“So you are two brothers.” Linghu Chong smiled.

“Yeah! We are six brothers!” Branch Fairy said.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Well, parents are dumb parents, no wonder they gave birth to six dumb sons.”

“What are you two’s names?” Linghu Chong asked the rest two.

“Let me tell him. I am the sixth. My name is Peachtree Fruit Fairy. My fifth brother is named Peachtree Flower Fairy,” the coward freak announced.

Linghu Chong was unable to stifle a laugh, thinking, “The Peachtree Flower Fairy has such an ugly face. He really has nothing even comparable to a peach tree flower.”

Seeing Linghu Chong’s smiling face, Flower Fairy said happily, “Among the six brothers, my name is the most beautiful one. Theirs are no match for mine!”

“Peachtree Flower Fairy is such a pleasant name, and Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, Peachtree Leaf, and Peachtree Fruit are all beautiful names too. Wonderful! Wonderful! If I could have a name so beautiful and pleasant, I’d be delighted beyond words.”

Every one of the six Fairies felt unspeakable happiness and couldn’t help but dance with joy, feeling that Linghu Chong was truly the number one nice guy in the world.

“Let’s keep going now. Will one of the Peachtree brothers please open my apprentice brother’s acupoint? Your acupoint-sealing techniques are way too advanced for me. There’s no way I’ll be able to open his acupoint all by myself,” Linghu Chong said with a smile.

Each getting a flattery, Peach Valley Six Fairies immediately vied with each other in rushing by Lu Dayou to open his sealed acupoints.

From the “Cliff of Contemplation” to the “House of Integrity” of the Huashan Sword School, it was somewhere between three or four miles. Other than Lu Dayou, everybody had good Qing-Gong skills and it took them almost no time to arrive at the outside of “House of Integrity.” As soon as they got there, Linghu Chong saw Lao Denuo, Liang Fa, Shi Daizi, Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi, and the bunch of dozens of apprentice brothers and sisters all standing outside of the hall way looking quite worried. Seeing that the big apprentice brother had arrived, everyone felt a bit relieved.

Lao Denuo greeted them and whispered to Linghu Chong, “Big apprentice brother, Master and Master-Wife are greeting guests inside.”

Linghu Chong turned his head back and signaled Peach Valley Six Fairies to not make any sound while they stand there waiting.

“Those six are my friends. You don’t have to worry about them. Let me go have a look,” he whispered to Lao Denuo and then peeked inside from the crack of the hall windows.

Normally when Yue Buqun and Madam Yue greet guests, apprentices would never have peeked in from the outside, however, since the Huashan Sword School was in great trouble right now, all the apprentices didn’t think what Linghu Chong did was anything inappropriate at all.

# Notes

[[←1](#)]

Fuzhou is the capital of Fujian Province, which is in the southeast part of China, just across the strait from Taiwan.



[←2]

Note here that Pingzhi is actually the first name. In China, one's family name is always placed before one's first name to show respect to the family heritage. The same applies to all names mentioned in the story.

[←3]

Bamboo Green is the name of a very famous Chinese wine. It got its name because the color of the wine is like the leaves of bamboo.

[←4]

Tael is a unit of weight (about 32.5 grams). It was popular as the unit for silver currency in ancient China.

[←5]

Sichuan is a province south of central China. It is far away from the province of Fujian and is famous for its very spicy food.

[←6]

In ancient China, it was considered low class for people to not wear anything on their legs.

[←7]

It is an old tradition in China that when a relative or an official in great power dies, people tie white cloth on their foreheads to show respect.

[←8]

Marquis Zhuge Liang was a very famous and well-respected military counselor in Sichuan of ancient China. (See his story in “Romance of the Three Kingdoms” by Luo Guanzhong.)

[←9]

To kneel and touch the forehead to the ground in expression of deep respect, worship, or submission, as formerly done in ancient China.



[←10]

Hunan is a neighboring province northwest of Fujian Province.

[←11]

See the story “Romance of the Three Kingdoms” by Luo Guanzhong.

[←12]

Qingcheng and Emei are two famous mountains in Sichuan Province. Martial arts groups tend to name themselves after either the style of their martial arts, or the name of the place they live in.

[←13]

In Taoism and Buddhism, the high-level monks or Taoists will shut themselves in a cave or somewhere secluded to meditate for a few weeks or months, without seeing anyone. They believe this kind of meditation is helpful in their studies.

[←14]

Luoyang is a large city in Henan Province, which is far northwest from Fujian Province.

[←15]

Shaolin is a Buddhist temple in Henan Province. Its monks are very famous for the Shaolin style martial arts form. Wutang is a Taoist temple in Hubei Province. It is the second most famous martial arts group after Shaolin. The well-known Tai-Chi martial arts form was created by Wutang.

## [←16]

In Chinese, “Shan” stands for mountain. These are five large mountains in central, eastern, southern, western and northern China. People call them the Five Mountains. Two of these have the same pronunciation, so we will be distinguishing them by using Hengshan and Heng-Shan. They are:

Central: Songshan (Henan Province);  
Eastern: Taishan (Shandong Province);  
Southern: Hengshan (Hunan Province);  
Western: Huashan (Shanxi Province);  
Northern: Heng-Shan (Hebei Province).

[←17]

This is a Chinese way of greeting, by cupping one fist with the palm of another hand and bowing slightly.



[←18]

In the Chinese zodiac, an animal represents each year. There are a total of twelve animals, and the cycle starts over every twelve years.

[←19]

This is a very famous dish in China. It got its name from a story: The smell of the dish was so good that the monk next door climbed over the wall to steal it.

[←20]

In ancient China, people did not have glass to seal their windows. Instead, they used paper to seal the frames.

[←21]

“Ying Xiong Hao Jie” is a Chinese phrase meaning heroes. The four great apprentices of Qingcheng each use one character in their names. Yu Renhao is using the character “Hao.”

[←22]

When Chinese martial artists name their moves, they always like to use names from legendary stories. Zhong Kui was half-god half-human in Chinese mythology and he had the special power to drive evil spirits away.

[←23]

According to Chinese martial art and medical procedures, there are many “acupoints” on a human body. By pinning or hitting them, you can disable the movements of muscles, blood flow or information flow from the nerves. Fang Renzhi hit their acupoints so that they could not move and had to stay still.

[←24]

In ancient China, polygamy was legal and common among rich people.

[←25]

A general term for certain two-stringed bowed instruments, popular in ancient China.



[←26]

An ancient breathing exercise that helps improve health and develop extra power and strength (sometimes an almost magical power that cannot be explained by science).

[←27]

Beggars Clan was a group made up of beggars. Members of the Beggars Clan used the number of bags carried to identify his status in the clan. When a new member joined the clan, he would be carrying only one bag. The higher his status was, the more bags he would be carrying.

[←28]

Like it was mentioned in chapter one, Ying Xiong Hao Jie means “heroes” in Chinese.

[←29]

In Chinese, “Lu” has the same pronunciation as the number six.

[←30]

Uncle-Master is the title used when a junior calls a senior master who is the apprentice brother/sister of the junior's Master. It is used regardless of the gender of the senior master.

[←31]

Pronounced as “hur”, not “he.”

[←32]

A form of Chinese Martial Arts that will allow the practitioner to jump higher and further, or run faster than an average person. The technique uses a combination of physical exercises and breathing exercises.

[←33]

“Bull-nose” is a mean name for Taoist Priests.



[←34]

In Chinese, Huiyan means attracting the wild geese back.

[←35]

It was a unique phenomenon for eunuchs to exist in Ancient Chinese. Chinese Emperors always had thousands of wives in the palace. Men were needed in the palace for many tasks, but the Emperor was afraid that these men would have affairs with his wives, so all men who wanted to work in the palace had to be castrated to ensure that no affairs would happen. It isn't known when exactly this started, but one can trace it back to at least 2,000 years ago.

[←36]

In Chinese, the character of Lin (meaning “Woods”) is made up of two Mu characters (meaning “Tree, or wood”).

[←37]

In Buddhism, monks and nuns are required to shave their heads, but in Taoism, Taoist Priests are not required to shave their heads.

[←38]

“Xiang” is another name of Hunan Province.

[←39]

According to Buddhism beliefs, there are eighteen levels of hell. The eighteenth level is the bottom-most one, and also the worst one. When one dies, he falls to one of levels of the hells. The smaller the number, the better it is, because then he can be reborn sooner. If one falls to the eighteenth level of hell, then he will have to spend eternity in hell, with no chance of being reborn.

[←40]

In Chinese philosophy and religion, there are two principles - one negative, dark and feminine (Yin) and one positive, bright, and masculine (Yang) - from whose interaction produce all things and dissolve all things. Here, Mu Gaofeng is referring to a method of having intercourse with multiple females and using the energy absorbed to nourish one's own health. This method is actually recorded in ancient Chinese medicine books, but most people consider this pornography.

[←41]

A Buddhist's way of praying.



[←42]

The Chinese character 'hu' is a combination of the character 'dog' and the character 'melon'.

[←43]

Bodhisattva Guanyin is a very famous Buddha. Most believe Bodhisattva Guanyin is a female, but others believe Bodhisattva Guanyin is a male. He/she is the main Buddha nuns pray to.

[←44]

Blunderbuss shots and music/drums were typical in ancient China as formal greetings to government officials. Gongs were used in front of the official's wagon to inform people on the street to yield the way for the government official. People blocking the way would be thrown into prison right away.

[←45]

Also explained in chapter two: A general term for certain two-stringed bowed music instruments, popular in ancient China.

[←46]

Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi are both famous philosophers in ancient China. Lao Zi started Taoism, and Zhuang Zi is a good scholar in Taoism.

[←47]

Sima Zhao was an emperor of Jin Dynasty in ancient China.

## [ ←48]

The Four Books and the Five Classics are books from ancient China. They were used as standard textbooks for people to study with.

The Four Books are:

*The Great Learning (Da-Xue)*

*The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong-Yong)*

*The Analects of Confucius (Lun-Yu)*

*Mencius (Meng-Zi)*

The Five Classics are:

*The book of Songs (Shi-Jing)*

*The Book of History (Shu-Jing)*

*The Book of Changes (Yi-Jing)*

*The Book of Rites (Li-Ji)*

*The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chun-Qiu)*

[←49]

Xiucan: one who passed the imperial examination at the county level in the Ming and Qing dynasties.



[←50]

Zhuangyuan: title conferred on the one who came first in the highest imperial examination.

[←51]

A pyramid-shaped dumpling made of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves (normally eaten during the Dragon Boat Festival).

[←52]

The town of Dragon-Spring in Zhejiang Province is well known for making quality blades.

[←53]

Shanxi Province, where Mount Huashan is. It's at the northwest part of China.

[←54]

Reminder: Fujian province is the Province Lin Pingzhi came from. The Fortune Prestige Escort House Headquarters was located at Fuzhou, which is the capital of Fujian Province.

[←55]

Reminder: Qing-Gong is a form of Chinese Martial Arts that will allow the practitioner to jump higher and further or run faster than an average person. The technique is a combination of muscle exercises and breathing exercises.

[←56]

Reminder: Qi-Gong is an ancient breathing exercise that helps improve health and acquire extra power and strength (sometimes an almost magical power that can not be explained by science).

[←57]

Chang-An is today's Xi'an city in Shanxi Province (Provincial capital). It was the capital for many dynasties including Tang Dynasty. It was considered one of the most populous cities in ancient China.



[←58]

This might be confusing. Shanxi (third intonation) province and Shan-Xi (first intonation) province are actually two neighboring provinces. Shan-Xi province is famous for its coalmines, wine, and vinegar. But Mount Huashan and Chang-An are in Shanxi province.

[←59]

Li Taiba, also called Li Bai, was a famous poet during Tang Dynasty. He was nicknamed the Fairy of Poem because of his exceptional talent in poems and Fairy of Wine because he loved drinking wine. The “Banished Fairy Wine House” was named after him hence he was banished by the Royal Court because of his drinking problem.

[←60]

In Chinese language, character “Hu” means fox. Tian Boguang is implying that Linghu Chong is as cunning as a fox.

[←61]

Emei in Chinese genuinely means beautiful women. Emei sting here has nothing to do with Emei Sect mentioned earlier in the novel. It's used because the weapon is specifically used by women.

[←62]

Just want to clarify that the character Feng here is a different one from the Feng in Feng Qingyang's name.

**The Smiling,  
Proud  
Wanderer:  
Volume 2**

**Jin Yong**

# **The Smiling, Proud Wanderer**

(笑傲江湖 / Xiào Ào Jiānghú)

## **Volume 2**

by

**Jin Yong**

### **Translators:**

Lanny Lin

Pokit

Bliss

### **Editor:**

HHaung

# Contents

[Chapter 10: Sword Training](#)  
[Chapter 11: Energy Streams](#)  
[Chapter 12: Assassins](#)  
[Chapter 13: Learning Music](#)  
[Chapter 14: Wine Cups](#)  
[Chapter 15: Medicine](#)  
[Chapter 16: Gaining Blood](#)  
[Chapter 17: In Love](#)  
[Chapter 18: Collaboration](#)  
[Chapter 19: The Wager](#)  
[Chapter 20: Imprisonment](#)



# **Chapter 10: Sword Training**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The old man nodded, let out a sigh, and then slowly walked to the front of the big rock to sit down. Tian Boguang yelled, “Here’s the chop!” and then slashed his knife at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong turned to the side to dodge and then fought back with a thrust.**

Linghu Chong was thunderstruck. He turned around and saw an old man with a gray beard in a green robe standing in front of the cave’s opening. The old man had a somewhat depressed expression on his face, which was as white as a sheet.

“Could this old man be the masked man in green robe I saw the other night? Where is he from? When did he come right behind my back? How come I didn’t feel a thing and had no idea about it?” He couldn’t help but feel bewildered.

“Are you...are you really Grandmaster Feng?” Tian Boguang asked in a trembling tone.

“It has gotten to be rare for people in this world to still remember my name.” The old man heaved a sigh.

In the instant, many thoughts flashed through Linghu Chong’s mind. “There is still a senior grandmaster of our Huashan Sword School alive today? Why haven’t I ever heard Master or Master-Wife mentioning anything about it? What if he is just an imposter who took the opportunity from Tian Boguang’s words? Wouldn’t everyone in the Martial World laugh at our Huashan Sword School if I recklessly salute him as a junior? Besides, what a big coincidence is this? As soon as Tian Boguang mentioned the name ‘Feng Qingyang,’ a ‘Feng Qingyang’ suddenly shows up right away?”

“Linghu Chong, what an useless lad you are!” The old man shook his head with another sigh. “Let me teach you. Use the move White Aurora Shooting the Sun first and follow up with Graceful Phoenix, then use Golden Geese Crossing Sky followed with Sword Interception Stance....” He talked on and on in a flow of eloquence and soon mentioned the names of thirty different moves.

Linghu Chong had learned all the thirty moves before, but the sword positions and the stances of those moves didn't seem to connect at all.

"What are you waiting for? Oh, I see. With your current understanding of martial arts, it isn't easy to just perform all thirty of them at once, indeed. Why don't you try them out slowly, first?" The old man instructed.

His voice was low and deep, and his face looked desolate. It almost appeared as if he had infinite grievance, yet there was a certain majestic feel in his tone.

"Well, there's nothing to lose if I give it a try," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

So he performed the White Aurora Shooting the Sun move and thrust his sword with the sword tip pointing up. Then he got stuck, having no clue how to connect the second move Graceful Phoenix to it.

"Alas! Idiot! Idiot! Only able to rigidly adhering to formalities with no adaptation, no wonder you are an apprentice of Yue Buqun. The art of swordplay calls for fluency like floating clouds and flowing water - natural and smooth, come and go freely. After you finished the move White Aurora Shooting the Sun and had your sword tip pointing up, couldn't you just follow the flow and slash it downwards? Even though there's no such posture in the move, why can't you adapt to the flow and make it more convenient for yourself?"

The words struck Linghu Chong's ears like bell rings and woke him. Slightly pulling the sword back with a slash, he naturally transformed it into the move Graceful Phoenix. Before it was entirely done, he had already changed it again and smoothly transformed it into the move Golden Geese Crossing the Sky. The long sword swished across above his head, and then with a hook and a jab, it easily turned into Sword Interception Stance - all the connections and transformations appeared to be smooth and flawless. With the ease of mind, he continued performing one move after

another following the old man's instruction. By the time he stopped at the move Ringing Bells and Drums, it was exactly a total of thirty moves. All of a sudden, Linghu Chong felt indescribable joy. On the old man's face, however, there was no trace of approval whatsoever.

"You got them connected alright, but see how stiff and rigid they are, also very clumsy. Even though you are still far from capable of fighting a master hand, it would be enough to deal with that little chap over there. Go ahead and try them out on him!" he demanded.

Linghu Chong still didn't quite believe that the old man was his Grand Uncle-Master, but he was quite convinced that the old man had to be an elite Kung Fu master. His sword pointing down at the ground, he bowed to salute to the old man, then turned to face Tian Boguang.

"Brother Tian, please go ahead!"

"I've seen you perform all thirty moves. What's there to fight about?" Tian Boguang questioned.

"If brother Tian doesn't want to fight, that's totally alright. Will you please leave now? I'd like to ask for some more advice from this senior master here. Sorry, can't be your company now," Linghu Chong said.

"What are you talking about? Do you expect me to just die for nothing only because you don't want to go down Mount Huashan with me?" Tian Boguang objected loudly. He turned to the old man.

"Grandmaster Feng, Tian Boguang is only a junior here. I am not worthy to exchange moves with you, the respectful one. If you join in the fight, it would really be beneath your dignity."

The old man nodded his approval with another sigh. He slowly walked by a big rock and sat down.

Tian Boguang felt great relief. "Look out!" he yelled and brought his knife swishing down upon Linghu Chong's head.

Linghu Chong dodged to the side and stabbed back with his long sword. The move was the fourth move Sword

Interception Stance the old man had told him earlier. Once starting his attack, he poured out many continuous moves with ease. Some of the moves he used were among the ones named by the old man, and some were outside of those thirty moves the old man had told him. Since he had comprehended the essence of the phrase “floating clouds and flowing water – natural and smooth, come and go freely,” his sword skills improved dramatically, and the fight went on well over a hundred moves.

All of a sudden, Tian Boguang roared loudly and chopped straight down. Knowing that it would be very difficult to dodge out of that one in time, Linghu Chong snapped his wrist and pointed his long sword toward Tian Boguang’s chest. Tian Boguang turned his knife around and smacked it at the sword. “Clank,” the knife and the sword clashed. Tian Boguang didn’t wait for Linghu Chong to pull back his sword. He simply let go of his own knife and jumped forward. Reaching out with his two hands, he seized Linghu Chong’s throat in a strangle hold. Linghu Chong was almost suffocated. In the rush, he dropped his long sword as well.

“If you don’t come with me, your old man here will choke you to death.” Tian Boguang yelled out.

He had been calling Linghu Chong a brother earlier with a very respectful tone. After the fierce fight of over a hundred moves, he really lost his temper and started calling himself Linghu Chong’s “old man” after he seized Linghu Chong’s throat.

Not able to breathe, Linghu Chong still shook his head as his face went purple from the choking.

“One hundred moves or two hundred moves, it doesn’t matter. As long as I am winning, you’ll have to go down Mount Huashan with me. The hell with the bet on the thirty moves thing. Your old man I don’t care!” Tian Boguang cursed between his teeth.

Linghu Chong wanted to laugh, but with Tian Boguang’s hands choking onto his throat hard, he couldn’t make any

sound.

"You idiot! Your finger can be used as a sword, too. Do you absolutely have to use a real sword for that Treasures All Over the Room move?" The old man reproved.

Those words worked the magic as a flash lighted in Linghu Chong's mind. He thrust out with his right hand and used the move Treasures All Over the Room. His middle finger and index finger struck the Tan-Zhong Acupoint on Tian Boguang's chest in a jab; Tian Boguang uttered a muffled groan and collapsed onto the ground, his hands letting go of Linghu Chong's throat.

Linghu Chong had no idea that such a casual jab would actually subdue the "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, a man who enjoyed great fame for his Kung Fu skills in the martial world, in such an easy manner. He gently rubbed his own throat, which was still hurting uncomfortably from Tian Boguang's choking, and then looked down at the evil rapist, who laid on the ground huddled up, twitching involuntarily. Seeing Tian Boguang showing the whites of his eyes and having lost his consciousness, Linghu Chong found himself deeply amazed and overjoyed. Instantly, he felt tremendous admiration toward the old man. Rushing by the old man's side, he knelt down and kowtowed.

"Grand Uncle-Master! Will you please pardon me! I have treated you with such disrespect."

"You don't think I am just swindling and bluffing now?" The old man let out a slight smile.

"I dare not! Grandmaster Feng, I am so fortunate to be able to meet a senior grandmaster of our school! This is so marvelous." He kowtowed more.

"You can get up now," the old man Feng Qingyang said.

Only after another three respectful kowtows, Linghu Chong stood up. Noticing that the old man had a very pale and pallid complexion, looking wan and sallow, he asked, "Grand Uncle-Master, are you hungry? I have some food in

the cave. Let me go get them.” He turned around and headed toward the cave.

“No need for that!” Feng Qingyang shook his head.

He squinted at the sun and then murmured, “The sunshine is so warm! It has been a long time since I last basked in the wonderful sunshine.”

Linghu Chong was taken by surprise, but he dared not ask.

Feng Qingyang threw a glance at the huddled up Tian Boguang on the ground. “You have jabbed onto his Tan-Zhong Acupoint,” he said. “With his mastery of martial arts skills, he will probably regain his consciousness in two hours. By then, he’ll start another round of harassing. Once you beat him one more time, he would have no choice but to behave and leave. After you subdue him, you must force him to swear a deadly oath that he would never mention to anyone that he had seen me.”

“When I won earlier, it was only because I got lucky and took him by surprise. I am still no match for him with my sword skills. To be able to subdue him...subdue him...,” Linghu Chong murmured.

Feng Qingyang shook his head. “You are Yue Buqun’s apprentice. I really shouldn’t teach you any Kung Fu. That day...that day...I swore an oath that I would never fight anyone in the remaining of my life. When I demonstrated the sword moves to you the other night, I just wanted to let you know that if one executes the Huashan Sword School’s Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword the right way, how can anyone ever flick the sword out of your grip? I suppose if I don’t make you do the work, I won’t be able to force a deadly oath out of Tian Boguang, promising not to let out the secret. You, follow me.”

Feng Qingyang walked in the cave and entered the back cave through the hole on the rock wall. Linghu Chong followed in behind him.



"You have studied and memorized all those drawings of Huashan style sword art on the rock wall. When you used them though, they were all totally off. Alas!" Feng Qingyang pointed at the rock wall and shook his head.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "So when I was studying those drawings here during those many times, Grand Uncle-Master had been watching me. I guess every time I was simply too focused in studying and didn't even notice that someone else was actually in the cave as well. If... if Grand Uncle-Master had been an enemy...hmm, if he were an enemy, even if I had found out about it, would I then have any chance of surviving?"

"The chap Yue Buqun is a total moron. You are very good apprentice material, but he turned you into a dumb fool with his teaching." Feng Qingyang continued.

Hearing Feng Qingyang's humiliating words to his respectful Master, Linghu Chong was very displeased.

"Grand Uncle-Master, I don't want you to teach me any more. I'll just go outside and force Tian Boguang to swear the oath, promising that he will never let out Grand Uncle-Master's secret," he said in a bold tone.

Feng Qingyang was seized by surprise, but it only took him an instant to understand the reason behind. "What if he won't agree? Are you going to kill him?" he asked dryly.

Linghu Chong hesitated and didn't know how to answer. He thought that since Tian Boguang had never intended to kill him even when he won the many fights, how could he himself be so cruel to kill Tian Boguang immediately after he got the upper hand?

"You are blaming me for swearing at your Master, aren't you? Fine. I won't mention his name any more. He calls me Uncle-Master. It should be alright for me to call him a 'chap,' shouldn't it?" Feng Qingyang asked.

"Grand Uncle-Master, if you stop scolding my respectful Master, of course I will listen to your advice cautiously," Linghu Chong replied.

"This is almost like I am begging you to learn from me." Feng Qingyang was amused.

"I dare not. Grand Uncle-Master, I beg for your pardon." Linghu Chong bowed.

Feng Qingyang pointed at the drawings of the Huashan style sword art on the rock wall and started explaining.

"These moves are indeed the unique moves among our school's sword arts. Most of them have long been lost, and even Yue...Yue...hmm...even your Master doesn't know them. Even though they are brilliant moves, when you use them one move at a time, others would still be able to overcome them...."

Hearing these words, Linghu Chong felt a sudden inspiration and vaguely understood an ultimate principle of sword art. He couldn't help but show a wild, joyful face.

"What have you figured out? Tell me about it." Feng Qingyang requested.

"Grand Uncle-Master, are you saying that if all the moves become an integral whole, then the enemy would have no way of breaking them?" Linghu Chong stated.

"Didn't I say that you are good material? You have very good comprehension." Feng Qingyang nodded happily. "Those Demon Cult Elders...." He pointed at the staff-wielding figure on the rock wall as he spoke.

"Is that an Elder of the Demon Cult?" Linghu Chong asked in bewilderment.

"Didn't you know? The ten skeletons are the remains of the Demon Cult Ten Elders," Feng Qingyang said while pointing at a skeleton on the ground.

"Why did all the Demon Cult Ten Elders fall dead here?" Linghu Chong became quite curious.

"Tian Boguang will wake up in two more hours. If you keep asking about these past events of many years ago, do you think you'll still have time left to learn some Kung Fu?" Feng Qingyang reproved.

“Right! Right! Grand Uncle-Master, please go on.” Linghu Chong replied.

“Those Demon Cult Elders had truly outstanding and brilliant minds. They were actually able to defeat the advanced moves of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance cleanly and completely.” Feng Qingyang sighed. “They didn’t know, however, that the most devastating move in the world is not inside Kung Fu, but in setting up schemes, intrigues, and traps. If one falls into someone’s clever trap, regardless of how brilliant his Kung Fu moves are, it would still be completely useless....” At these words, he raised his head and fell into a daze. Apparently he had remembered many things from the past.

Hearing the bitterness in his tone and seeing the anguish look on his face, Linghu Chong dared not interrupt and only thought to himself, “Could it be true that the Five Mountains Sword Alliance really had ‘no way to win in a fair fight,’ so they tricked the enemy into a trap? Grand Uncle-Master Feng is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, but he probably didn’t object to such contemptible means. I guess in order to counter the enemies from the Demon Cult, it is probably necessary to use some contemptible means.”

Feng Qingyang went on talking. “If we judge them by their understanding of advanced Kung Fu theories, these Demon Cult Elders shouldn’t be counted as ones who have entered the realm of top level Kung Fu. They didn’t know that moves are static, but the one executing the moves is alive. No matter how clever the counter-move is for breaking static moves, as soon as they encounter moves performed in a lively way, they would feel like their arms and legs are all tied up and would have no other choice but to give themselves up to the opponent’s mercy. You must remember the keyword ‘lively’ here. When you learn a move, you need to learn it in a lively way; when you execute a move, you also need to execute it lively. If you only rigidly adhere to formalities without adding your own lively elements, even if

you have mastered thousands or tens of thousands unique moves, as soon as you encounter a true elite master hand, he would still be able to overcome every single one of them.”

Linghu Chong felt tremendous joy in his heart. He was the unrestrained and unconventional type. Each of Feng Qingyang’s word struck a chord in his heart. He kept agreeing and agreeing, “Yes, yes! One must learn it lively and use it lively.”

“Each of the Five Mountains sword schools have countless number of idiots who believed that as long as they become proficient with the sword moves taught by their masters then naturally they would become elite fighters.” He paused then let out a disgruntled snort. “You must have heard of the saying, ‘Once memorizing three hundred poems well, one will be capable to write poems himself!’ After memorizing others’ poems well, one might be able to write a couple of ragged verses, but without being original in conception, can he ever become a real poet?” Feng Qingyang criticized.

His criticism naturally included Yue Buqun as one of the “idiots” he had mentioned, but since firstly, Linghu Chong felt the comments were quite convincing, and secondly, Feng Qingyang didn’t mention Yue Buqun’s name specifically, he didn’t argue.

“Learn it lively and use it lively is only the first step. Only when you can fight with no moves, you will eventually reach the realm of a true elite fighter. When you said ‘all the moves become an integral whole, then the enemy would have no way of breaking them’ earlier, you’ve only gotten less than half right. It’s not ‘an integral whole’ but simply no moves. No matter how hard you work on making the moves an integral whole, as long as there’s a trace of the connection, your enemy would have a flaw to exploit. If you don’t have any moves at all, then how is your enemy going to break your move?”

Linghu Chong's heart thumped wildly and even his palms became burning hot as he mumbled, "No move at all, how do you break it? No move at all, how do you break it?" Suddenly, a whole new world he had never seen before or even dreamed about appeared in front of his eyes.

Feng Qingyang continued. "If you want to slice a piece of meat, you need to have the piece of meat before you can slice it; if you want to cut some firewood, you need to have the firewood before you can cut it; if your enemy wants to break your sword move, he needs to have your sword move before he can break it. When an ordinary person who has never learned any Kung Fu waves a sword wildly, no matter how knowledgeable you are, you still wouldn't be able to predict where his next thrust or chop will land. Even someone with the most advanced sword skills still wouldn't be able to defeat his move. Because there is no move, it's impossible to break the move. If this person has never learned any Kung Fu, then even though he doesn't have a sword move, others can still knock him down easily. True first-class sword art, on the other hand, will enable you to control others, not controlled by others."

He picked up a shinbone from the ground and randomly pointed one end of it at Linghu Chong. "How are you going to break this move of mine?"

Linghu Chong had no idea what move that was. After a pause, he said, "This is not a move, so there's no way I can break it."

"That's correct." Feng Qingyang smiled. "When a Kung Fu practitioner uses a weapon or throw punches and kicks, he would always have moves. All you need to know is how to overcome it, and once you do know how, you can easily defeat his move and subdue him."

"But what if the enemy didn't have any move either?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Then he must be a first-class elite fighter also. The result of the fight could go either way. Maybe you are better, or

maybe he's better," Feng Qingyang answered. He let out a sigh and said, "In today's world, it's very difficult to find such an elite fighter. If by chance you meet one or two, then you have really good fortune. During my entire life, I've only met three of them."

"Who are these three?" Linghu Chong couldn't help but ask.

Feng Qingyang stared at him for a short while and then split into a smile. "Among Yue Buqun's apprentices, there's actually one who likes to poke his nose everywhere and not willing to devote himself to sword training. Great! Wonderful!"

"Sorry, I am wrong." Linghu Chong blushed and quickly bowed for forgiveness.

"No, you are not wrong." Feng Qingyang smiled. "You are a lively lad, just the type to my liking. We don't have much time left. You go ahead and work on merging all the thirty to forty Huashan style sword art moves together. Think how you can get them going smoothly with no interruption, and then try to forget all of them. You need to forget all of them completely without leaving a single one in your head. Then, a bit later, you can use the Huashan Style Sword Art With No Moves to fight Tian Boguang."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered, feeling half surprised and half pleased.

Linghu Chong studied the drawings on the rock with rapt attention. During the past several months, he had memorized the Huashan style sword moves on the rock wall well, so he didn't have to spend any time learning the moves. All he had to do was to try to connect all the distinct and separate sword moves together.

"Everything must be following the natural rhythm. Act when you have to act and stop when you have to stop. If you simply can't connect some of them, then don't connect them. In short, don't force anything," Feng Qingyang pointed out.

Linghu Chong nodded. Since all he had to do was to follow the natural flow, it became an easy task for him regardless of connecting them cleverly or clumsily. Soon, he had connected all the thirty to forty moves of Huashan style sword art together. But to merge all of them into one with no traceable rigid gaps was not so easy. He waved his sword, sometimes slashing to the left, sometimes chopping to the right, without thinking about any moves drawn on the rock wall. He didn't care if his posture or position was close to the drawing or not and simply followed his own will. Occasionally when he had a smooth one, he couldn't help but feeling quite pleased with himself.

He had been in sword training for over ten years. Every time when he practiced, he would always stay very focused with all his heart, not daring to slack in any way. Yue Buqun was a very strict teacher. When his apprentices practiced forms or sword arts, if anyone's arm or leg were slightly off from the perfect position, he would immediately correct them. Everyone's every move or posture had to be in the absolutely perfect position without a single error to get his approval. Linghu Chong was the first and most senior apprentice, besides, he was always eager to do well in everything and excel others. In order to gain praises from Master and Master-Wife, he always put in extra efforts to be strict with himself. Feng Qingyang, on the other hand, had taught in a totally opposite way – the more casual the better. That fitted in with his personality just perfectly. He felt the kind of carefree and joy beyond words, and it seemed as if the pleasure was even more enjoyable than drinking ages old good wine. While he was still intoxicated in practicing, Tian Boguang had shouted from outside.

“Brother Linghu, will you please come out so we can have another contest.”

That brought Linghu Chong back to reality. He stopped and stood still.

“Grand Uncle-Master, do you think this random slashing and chopping style sword form of mine will enable me to block his fast knife chops?” Linghu Chong asked hopefully.

“If you want to block, of course it won’t help you much. But why do you have to block?” Feng Qingyang said.

Linghu Chong immediately got the idea and the feeling of joy washed over him.

“That’s right. He is begging me to go down Mount Huashan with him, so of course he dared not to kill me. In that case, despite what knife moves he uses, I can simply ignore them and just focus on my own attacks.”

Linghu Chong stepped out of the cave with his sword in his hand and saw Tian Boguang waiting with his knife drawn.

“Brother Linghu, after Grandmaster Feng gave you some knacks and pointers, your sword skills surely improved a lot. However, when you sealed my point just now, it was only because of my oversight. I am not convinced yet. Let’s have another fight,” Tian Boguang suggested.

“Fine!” Linghu Chong answered as he thrust his sword out in a crooked manner. The blade wobbled as it moved forward; there was no strength attached in the thrust at all.

“What kind of move is that?” Tian Boguang was bewildered.

Seeing Linghu Chong’s sword getting closer, Tian Boguang was just about to fend it off using his knife when Linghu Chong suddenly pulled his right hand back and jabbed the sword toward an empty space. Then following the jab, Linghu Chong retracted the sword quickly. The sword handle almost struck his own chest when he flicked his wrist, which sent the sword handle to another empty space to his right. Tian Boguang was even more bewildered. He threw a gentle probing chop cautiously. Linghu Chong didn’t even care to dodge and simply drove his sword tip toward his opponent’s lower stomach in an angle.

“How weird!” Tian Boguang shouted as he turned his knife around to block it.



After the two exchanged several moves, Linghu Chong started using the Huashan style sword moves on the rock wall, attacking without any defending, almost as if he was just practicing sword form all by himself. The continuous attacks sent Tian Boguang into a frantic rush.

“If you decide to ignore this chop of mine again, don’t blame me when I chop your arm off!” Tian Boguang shouted.

“It’s not going to be that easy!” Linghu Chong grinned as he initiated another three thrusts, all attacked from very odd and unusual positions. Relying on his fast eyes and quick hands, Tian Boguang successfully fended all of them off. Just when he was about to start his counter-attack, Linghu Chong suddenly threw his long sword straight up in the air. Tian Boguang looked up at the sword in the air when suddenly a heavy punch landed squarely on his nose. Blood immediately gushed out from his nose. While Tian Boguang was still in shock, Linghu Chong used his hand as a sword and stabbed it out, and it struck Tian Boguang on his Tan-Zhong Acupoint once again. Tian Boguang slowly collapsed down, his face covered with a mixture of confusion and anger.

Linghu Chong turned around and Feng Qingyang called him back into the cave.

“You just got yourself another three hours for sword training. He is hurt even worse this time. He won’t be able to wake up as easily as the last time. Only that when you fight him the next time, maybe he’ll go all out and might not yield to you any more. You must be very careful. Go ahead and try out those Hengshan style sword art moves.” Feng Qingyang suggested.

After getting more pointers and advice from Feng Qingyang, Linghu Chong used each move as if there was no move – with the essence of the move but without the form of it. Those unique Hengshan style sword moves by themselves were already extremely unpredictable and volatile, now it was even more difficult to find any trace of gap among them.

After Tian Boguang woke up, the two of them fought another seventy to eighty moves before Tian Boguang got knocked down once again.

It was already quite late in the day. Linghu Chong placed Tian Boguang, who was unable to move at all because of the sealed acupoints, behind some big rocks when Lu Dayou brought food up the cliff, while Feng Qingyang stayed inside the back cave.

"Sixth apprentice brother, I am having some real good appetites these days. Will you please bring some extra food tomorrow?" Linghu Chong asked.

Lu Dayou could tell that his big apprentice brother's face glowed with health and radiating vigor, quite different from the depressed and upset one in the last couple months. He couldn't help with his joy. He also noticed that Linghu Chong's robe was soaked with sweat and thought that Linghu Chong must have been practicing assiduously with his sword techniques.

"Great! I'll bring up a large basket full of food tomorrow," he said.

After Lu Dayou left, Linghu Chong opened Tian Boguang's sealed acupoints and invited him and Feng Qingyang to have dinner together. Feng Qingyang had enough after only a half bowl full of rice. Tian Boguang on the other hand, felt very aggrieved and had no appetite at all, raking the food in his mouth and pouring out streams of abuses at the same time. Suddenly, with a loud crack, the china bowl in his hand smashed into pieces from the tremendous forces coming from his grip. Broken china pieces and rice fell all over his clothes and the floor.

"Brother Tian, why are you being so hard on a rice bowl?" Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter.

"Damn it, I am being hard on you," Tian Boguang yelled in rage. "When we fought, you took advantage of me and spared no effort in defending yourself whatsoever, only because I didn't want to kill you. Tell me, you think this is

fair? If I hadn't given ground to you, I'd have chopped your head off within thirty moves. Humph! Humph! Damn the little...little...."

Obviously he had wanted to scold Yilin, the little nun, but for some reason he stopped short, instead, he stood up and drew his knife.

"Linghu Chong, come and fight me again if you've got guts," he yelled out.

"Fine!" Linghu Chong replied and stepped forth, sword in hand.

Using the same strategy again, Linghu Chong paid no attention to Tian Boguang's fast knife chops and simply stabbed his sword at Tian Boguang with clever moves. But this time Tian Boguang was quite relentless. After they exchanged about twenty moves or so, he threw two chops - one landed on Linghu Chong's thigh and the other one left a cut on Linghu Chong's left arm. He had shown some mercy after all - neither of the two wounds was critical. In astonishment accompanied by great pain, Linghu Chong found himself in a very awkward situation. His sword techniques became very sluggish and only a few move later, Tian Boguang kicked him down to the ground.

"Do you want more fights?" Placing the sharp blade right next to Linghu Chong's throat, Tian Boguang yelled. "Humph, I'll make sure to leave a couple of cuts on you every time, so even though you won't die, your blood will drain and your arms and legs will look really good."

"Of course I want more fights! Even if I can't beat you, do you think my Grand Uncle-Master Feng would just look on with folded arms and let you ride roughshod?" Linghu Chong rebuffed with a smile.

"He is a senior grandmaster. He won't pick a fight with me," Tian Boguang said as he moved his knife away.

Fearing that Feng Qingyang might start a fight out of anger because he had wounded Linghu Chong, Tian Boguang was actually quite apprehensive. Even though Feng

Qingyang looked very old, he sure wasn't rotten. From Feng's piercing eyes, Tian Boguang could tell that Feng must have excellent inner energy, not mentioning his god-like sword skills. He figured that Feng didn't even have to kill – all Feng needed to do was to drive him down Mount Huashan, and that would be just as bad.

Linghu Chong tore a piece of his robe off and used it to wrap up the two wounds before entering the cave.

“Grant Uncle-Master, that chap has changed his strategy and decided to cut me for real now! If my right arm gets wounded and can't use a sword anymore, it would be impossible to beat him.” Linghu Chong shook his head in a wry smile.

“Luckily it's late already. You can tell him that you'll fight him again tomorrow morning. Let's not sleep tonight. I'll use the entire night to teach you three sword moves,” Feng Qingyang instructed.

“Three moves?” Linghu Chong repeated, not understanding why a mere three sword moves would take up an entire night to learn.

“You look like a smart one. I wonder if you are really that smart or only look like one. If you are truly smart, then you might be able to learn the three sword moves within the night. If you aren't smart and only have ordinary comprehension, then...then...there would be no need to fight him again tomorrow morning, and you can simply admit your failure and follow him off Mount Huashan!” Feng Qingyang said.

Hearing those words from his Grand Uncle-Master, Linghu Chong knew that the three sword moves must be very extraordinary and sophisticated. That actually aroused his willingness to take on the challenge.

“Grand Uncle-Master,” he said fearlessly, “if I can't learn these three sword moves within one night, then I'd rather die from his blade than surrender and leave Mount Huashan with him.”

“Good.” Feng Qingyang smiled. He raised his head and thought for quite a while before finally saying, “To learn three moves within one night is really asking for the impossible. You won’t need the second move just yet. We can work on only the first one and the third one. But...but...many of the variations in the third move come from the second move. Very well! Let’s ignore all the related variations and see if it will work.”

He was more like talking to himself. But after thinking about it for a moment, he shook his head.

Seeing the worried look on Feng Qingyang’s face, Linghu Chong became very anxious. The harder it is to learn a type of martial arts, of course, the more powerful it will be. Then he heard Feng Qingyang murmuring again.

“If he forgets one of the three hundred and sixty variations in the first move, then he would get the third move wrong. That’s not going to work.”

Linghu Chong was astonished when he heard that only the first move already contained three hundred and sixty variations.

Feng Qingyang started counting with his fingers. “Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You. Jia turns into Bing, Bing turns into Geng, Geng turns into Kui. Zi connects Chou, Chen connects Si, Wu connects Wei. Wind to thunder is one change, mountain to lake is one change, water to fire is one change. Qian and Kun activate each other, Zhen and Dui activate each other, Li and Si activate each other. Three increases to five, five increases to nine....”

The more he counted the more worried he looked. Finally he said with a heavy sigh, “Chong, when I learned this move, it took me three months. To expect you to learn two moves in one night is really like a joke. Think about it, ‘Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang....’”

At those words, he stopped talking and apparently was lost in deep thought. After a long while, he asked.

“Now, where was I?”

“Grand Uncle-Master, you said Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Ha, you’ve got good memory. What’s next?” Feng Qingyang raised his eyebrows.

“Grand Uncle-Master said, ‘Jia turns into Bing, Bing turns into Geng, Geng turns into Kui....’” Linghu Chong recited along and was actually able to repeat almost half of what Feng Qingyang said, but he could no longer remember the rest of it.

“Have you learned the General Index of the Dugu Nine Swords before?” Feng Qingyang was astonished.

“No. I have never learned anything like that before. I had no idea that this is called the Dugu Nine Swords.” Linghu Chong replied.

“If you haven’t learned it before, how come you are able to recite it?” Feng Qingyang asked.

“I just memorized it when you read it just now,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Hey, this might work!” Feng Qingyang slapped his thigh in excitement. “Although you won’t be able to learn the whole thing, you can simply memorize it. It would be alright if we only learn half of the third move. Now remember these: Gui-Mei tends toward Wu-Wang, Wu-Wang tends toward Tong-Ren, Tong-Ren tends toward Da-You....”

He went on and on and recited over three hundred words before finally saying, “Give it a try. Recite it.”

Linghu Chong had been staying very focused trying to memorize the script. After getting the go, he started reciting and only missed ten words or so. Feng Qingyang corrected them. The second time when Linghu Chong recited them, he only missed seven words. By the time he finished reciting the script a third time, he didn’t miss any word at all.

“Excellent! Excellent!” Feng Qingyang was very pleased. He then taught Linghu Chong another section of the script

about three hundred words long. After Linghu Chong memorized those well, he taught the next section of about three hundred words to Linghu Chong.

The General Index of the Dugu Nine Swords had a total of over three thousand words, besides, the contents of the script weren't really connected to each other logically, so even though Linghu Chong had extraordinary memorizing abilities, he still couldn't help but remember parts of it while forgetting other parts of it. It took him over two hours and many reminders from Feng Qingyang to finally memorize the entire script with no errors. Feng Qingyang made him recite the script from the very beginning to the very end another three times and was finally convinced that he had memorized all of them.

"The General Index is the key and foundation of the Dugu Nine Swords. Even though you have memorized it at the moment, you only did it by ear for the sake of saving time while having no idea about the theories behind. You can forget about it as easily. From now on, you must recite it days and nights."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered.

"The first move of the Dugu Nine Swords, General Index Stance, has many variations to implement the General Index Script. Let's not rush into that one yet. The second move, Sword-breaking Stance, can be used to overcome sword arts from every single school or cult in the world. No need to rush into that one either. The third move, Knife-breaking Stance, can be used to overcome knife moves of Single Knife, Double Knives, Willow-Leaf Cutlass, Ghost-Beheaded Saber, Large Cleaver, Horse-Cutting Blade, and so on. Tian Boguang is using the Fast Knife Chops technique out of the Single Knife moves. Let's focus on learning the part about how to overcome his knife techniques specifically tonight."

Realizing that the second move of the Dugu Nine Swords could overcome all the sword arts from all the schools and clans out there, and the third move of the Dugu Nine Swords

could overcome all the knife moves, while feeling stunned, Linghu Chong couldn't help but show his joy.

"The nine stances must be very brilliant. I have never heard of it before." Because of the great excitement, his voice trembled.

"Your Master probably has never seen the moves of the Dugu Nine Swords, but he sure has heard about the name Dugu Nine Swords before. He just doesn't want to mention it to you, that's all," Feng Qingyang said.

"Why's that?" Linghu Chong asked with surprise.

Feng Qingyang didn't answer the question and went on explaining the moves. "The third move, Knife-breaking Stance, stresses on using light to resist heavy and using fast to overcome slow. The chap Tian Boguang's fast knife chops are surely very fast, so you will have to be even faster than him. For a young lad like you, it's probably ok to try to be faster than him; you might win or you might lose. There's no guaranteed success. For an old rotten folk like me, if I still wanted to be faster than him, then the only solution would be launching my attack before he even starts his. If you can foresee what kind of a move he will be using and then scramble before him, before the enemy even raised his hand, your sword is already pointing at his vital parts. That way no matter how fast your enemy is, you will still be faster."

"Yes, yes! So it teaches about how to anticipate the enemy beforehand." Linghu Chong nodded again and again.

"Good, good! You got it!" Feng Qingyang praised as he applauded. "'Anticipating the enemy beforehand' is precisely the key to this set of sword techniques. Before anyone executes a move, there will always be many signs that you can catch. If he plans to slash toward your left arm with his next chop, he will certainly cast a glance at your left arm, and if his knife is in the lower right part at the time, then of course he will raise his knife in an arc before swishing his blade down in an angle."



Feng Qingyang went on and explained all the variations in the third sword stance that would overcome fast knife chops, one by one in great details. Linghu Chong felt so relaxed and happy as he listened in. He almost felt like that he was a country boy who had just entered the inner circle of the royal palace, and every single thing he saw or heard was new and interesting. The third sword stance had very complicated variations, and within the limited time, Linghu Chong was only able to comprehend about twenty percent of it. He simply worked hard on memorizing the rest.

The teacher taught enthusiastically and the student studied energetically; both of them lost track of time completely. Suddenly, Tian Boguang shouted outside of the cave.

“Brother Linghu, it’s daybreak now! Are you awake yet?”

“Wow, it’s daybreak already,” Linghu Chong uttered.

“It’s a pity that we had so little time.” Feng Qingyang sighed. “You’ve learned very quickly, way beyond my expectation already. Go ahead and fight him,” he said.

“Yes.” Linghu Chong answered. He closed his eyes and went through the gist of all the things he had learned during the night in his head. Suddenly he opened his eyes and asked.

“Grand Uncle-Master, I still have one more question. Why are all the variations attacking techniques with no defending ones at all?”

“Dugu Nine Swords, once stepping in, never steps back! Every technique is an attacking technique. When you force your enemy to have no other choice but to defend himself, of course there’s no need to defend yourself. Senior master Dugu Seeking-A-Loss, who created this set of sword techniques, had a name ‘Seeking-A-Loss.’ He had been seeking a loss all his life and still couldn’t get one. Once the sword techniques were executed, he would become unmatched anywhere in the world. Why would he have to defend? If anyone could have forced him to draw his sword

back and defend himself, the respectful master would have burst with joy and be delighted beyond measure.” Feng Qingyang said.

“Dugu Seeking-A-Loss, Dugu Seeking-A-Loss,” Linghu Chong muttered as he imagined how the senior master had wandered about the Martial World, unmatched anywhere, with only his sword, and couldn’t even find a single one who was capable of forcing him into a defending stance. That was truly admirable.

“Hurry up! Come out! Let me give you two more cuts!” Tian Boguang’s voice rose again.

“I am coming!” Linghu Chong replied.

“I am very concerned about one thing right now.” Feng Qingyang knitted his eyebrows together. “When you go out to fight him, if he injures your right arm or right wrist as soon as the fight breaks out, then you would be incapable to fight and leave yourself at his mercy. I am quite worried about that.”

“I’ll do my best, Grand Uncle-Master! You didn’t waste all that time teaching me with all your heart. I won’t let you down no matter what,” Linghu Chong said fearlessly, in high spirits.

As soon as he stepped out of the cave, he immediately put on a dejected and apathetic face. After a yawn, a stretch, and then some rubbing into his eyes, he finally said to Tian Boguang.

“Hey, brother Tian, you got up too early. Didn’t you have a good rest last night?”

In the mean time, he was actually thinking to himself, “All I need is to hold out through this current one. If I get to study several more hours, I would never be afraid of him again.”

“Brother Linghu,” Tian Boguang said as he raised his knife, “I really don’t intend to hurt you, but you are simply too stubborn and won’t go down Mount Huashan with me. If we continue fighting like this, I’ll be forced to add ten or

twenty more cuts on you and have you beaten black and blue. Wouldn't that be too bad for you?"

Linghu Chong suddenly got an idea. "You don't even need to add ten or twenty more cuts on me. All you need to do is to cut my right arm off or injure my right hand, so I can't use a sword. Then wouldn't I be at your disposal as you wish? Either to kill me or take me prisoner?"

"I only want you to admit your loss. Why do I want to injure your right arm or right hand?" Tian Boguang shook his head.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed, yet he put on a very depressed face. "I am afraid that you are just saying it right now. Once you get mad because of your losses, you would spare no effort in using all kinds of cruel and vicious tactics," he complained.

"You don't have to goad me. First, I have no grudges against you; secondly, I respect you as a true man with integrity; thirdly, if I injure you too badly, I am afraid someone might come and give me trouble. Go ahead!" Tian Boguang said.

"Alright! Brother Tian, please go ahead." Linghu Chong replied.

Tian Boguang gave a fake slash and immediately followed it with a tilted chop. His blade flashed in the sunshine with blinding reflections and the chop looked very vicious. Linghu Chong was about to overcome it with one of the variations in the third sword stance out of the Dugu Nine Swords, but Tian Boguang's knife moves came too fast, by the time he was going to attack, the knife move had already changed. He was just one step too slow.

"How terrible! How terrible! I can't even be fast enough to use the newly learned sword techniques. Grand Uncle-Master must be calling me an idiot right now," Linghu Chong groaned inwardly in great worries.

After a few more moves, cold sweats started rolling down Linghu Chong's forehead. But in Tian Boguang's eyes, his

sword techniques looked extremely fierce, and every move seemed as if it was the exact restraint to Tian's knife moves. Tian Boguang couldn't help but feel worried.

"He could have killed me with the last several sword techniques. Why did he slow it down just a little bit intentionally?" he thought to himself. "Oh, I got it. He is being lenient and wants to beat me into a retreat in the face of difficulties. But even though I see the difficulties, I can't simply retreat. I have to hold out with all my might."

Because of these thoughts, with every chop, he dared not to use all his strength and made sure he would always have extra energy left in case of an emergency. The two dreaded each other and both fought in a very cautious manner.

After a while, Tian Boguang gradually increased his knife chopping speed, and Linghu Chong also became more familiar with the variations of the Dugu Nine Swords third sword stance. While lights of the knife and the sword flashed, the two fought faster and faster.

Suddenly Tian Boguang let out a loud roar as he threw a kick with his right foot, which struck Linghu Chong in the stomach. Linghu Chong fell down facing up.

In the split of a second, Linghu Chong thought, "All I need is another day and night. This time tomorrow I am sure I can beat him." He let go of his sword, shut his eyes tight, held his breath, and pretended to be knocked out cold.

Seeing that Linghu Chong laid on the ground unconscious, Tian Boguang was stunned. But knowing that Linghu Chong was cunning and crafty, he dared not to bend over to check, afraid that Linghu Chong might jump up and attack all of a sudden to seek a victory from a defeat. So he crossed his blade in front of him and then took a couple of steps closer.

"Brother Linghu? Are you alright?" he called out.

He called a few more times and found Linghu Chong finally regaining himself slowly with little breathing.

"Let's...let's fight again." Linghu Chong said in a trembling voice.

He struggled to stand up, but half way up, his left leg gave out and he fell on the ground again.

"You are not going to make it. Why don't you have a good rest for a day and then follow me down Mount Huashan tomorrow?" Tian Boguang suggested.

Linghu Chong didn't express any opinion of his and pushed the ground with one hand, trying to stand up while panting hard.

With no more doubts, Tian Boguang took a step forward and grabbed onto Linghu Chong's right arm to prop him up, but when he took the step forward, his foot "happened" to step on top of Linghu Chong's long sword on the ground, and while guarding himself with the knife in his right hand, his grip also happened to grab onto an acupoint on Linghu Chong's right arm to make sure Linghu Chong couldn't play any tricks. Linghu Chong's entire body weight hung onto Tian Boguang's left arm and he appeared to be completely weak and frail.

"Who asked for your help? Damn it!" Linghu Chong swore and then limped back into the cave.

"Hey, you just gained an entire day and night without any extra effort. Don't you think it was a bit despicable and shameless?" Feng Qingyang said with a smile.

"Well, when you are dealing with despicable and shameless people, I suppose a small despicable and shameless trick would be acceptable." Linghu Chong laughed.

"What if you are dealing with a gentleman?" Feng Qingyang asked with a serious face.

"A gentleman?" Linghu Chong was taken by surprise and became speechless.

"What are you going to do if you are dealing with a gentleman?" Feng Qingyang fixed his piercing eyes on Linghu Chong's face and asked coldly.

“Well, even though he is a gentleman, if he wants to kill me, I can’t just let him. When I have to, I guess I will have to use a little bit of the despicable and shameless tricks,” Linghu Chong answered.

Feng Qingyang was delighted beyond measurement. “Great! Great! If you can say that, then you are not a hypocrite who only pretends to do good,” he said loudly. “A true man does things to his own like, just like floating clouds and flowing water – natural and smooth, come and go freely. Rules of the Martial World or regulations of schools and clans are all complete bull!”

Linghu Chong let out a slight smile. Every word of Feng Qingyang had struck a chord in his heart and made him feel indescribable joy. But since Master had been repeatedly admonishing him that even if one had to give up his own life, he should never defame the great reputation of the Huashan Sword School by breaking school rules or violating regulations of the Martial World, he really couldn’t echo Grand Uncle-Master’s point publicly; besides, the words “hypocrite who only pretends to do good” seemed to be satirizing his Master’s nickname of “Gentleman Sword,” so he only let out a slight smile and didn’t chime in.

Feng Qingyang reached out with his wizened fingers and stroked Linghu Chong’s hair gently, a bright smile blossoming on his face.

“Among Yue Buqun’s apprentices, there are actually good talents like you. That chap does have some taste. He wasn’t a complete loser.” The “chap” he had mentioned of course meant Yue Buqun.

“Kid, you really suit my taste. Come on, let’s practice some more of Great Hero Dugu’s first sword stance and the third sword stance.” Feng Qingyang patted on Linghu Chong’s shoulder.

Feng Qingyang went ahead and picked some key issues in the first sword stance of the Dugu Nine Swords to explain to Linghu Chong. After Linghu Chong comprehended them,

he then explained in detail the related variations in the third sword stance with both words and gestures. There were some long swords in the back cave, so both of them used Huashan style long swords to demonstrate and perform. Linghu Chong memorized everything with all his heart, and every time when he had a question, he would ask it right away. Because they had plenty of time during the day, the learning process wasn't as intense as the night before, and each stance and variation could be explained and demonstrated in great details.

After dinner, Linghu Chong slept for four hours and then continued with the learning. The next morning, Tian Boguang was convinced that Linghu Chong had been injured pretty badly the previous day, so he didn't even press with his shouts outside this time. Linghu Chong was just happy that he could continue learning sword techniques at the back cave. By the time of about two o'clock in the afternoon, Linghu Chong had learned all the variations in the third sword stance of the Dugu Nine Swords completely.

"It's no big deal if you still can't beat him today. If you get to study for another day and night, I am sure you will win tomorrow no matter what," Feng Qingyang declared.

Linghu Chong nodded and then walked out of the cave slowly with the long sword left by a senior grandmaster of the Huashan Sword School in hand. When he saw Tian Boguang looking into the distance from the edge of the cliff, he put on a pretended surprised face.

"Why, brother Tian? How come you are still here?"

"I am waiting for you. Sorry about the offense yesterday. Are you feeling better today?"

"I didn't see anything getting better. The wound on my leg from your knife chop is still hurting really badly."

"Ha-ha, that day when we fought in Hengyang Town, your wounds were a lot more severe than today, yet you never said anything to give the impression of weakness. I know you have a whole bag of tricks. When you strike a pose to show

your weakness, you probably are thinking about a surprise attack. I am not going to fall for it," Tian Boguang said with a smile.

"You have already fallen for it. Even if you can figure it out right now, it would still be too late!" Linghu Chong's face split into a big smile. "Brother Tian, look out!"

At the exact moment of his last word, Linghu Chong thrust his sword at Tian Boguang's chest. Tian Boguang raised his knife hurriedly to parry it, but his knife hit nothing. Meanwhile, Linghu Chong's second thrust had arrived.

"Excellent speed!" Tian Boguang praised as he crossed his knife to block the attack, but Linghu Chong had already launched his third and forth thrusts.

"I've got some even faster ones," Linghu Chong declared.

He immediately thrust out the fifth and the sixth attacks. Once he started his attacks, each thrust was followed by another continuous thrust, and each thrust was faster than the previous one. He had really grasped the essence of the Dugu Nine Swords – once stepping in, never step back, and every thrust is an attack.

After ten moves or so, Tian Boguang became terror-stricken. He had no clue how to fend off the endless of attacks. Every time when Linghu Chong lunge a thrust, he would take a step back. After another ten thrusts, he had retreated to the very brink of the cliff. Linghu Chong didn't slow down his attack one bit and with four whistling sounds, he lunged another four thrusts, all of which pointing at Tian Boguang's vital parts. Tian Boguang worked his best and parried two of the thrusts away, but could not fend off the third thrust in any way. He stepped back with his left foot but his foot only landed on emptiness. He knew clearly that it was a bottomless abyss behind him and anyone falling down it would be smashed into pieces. At the critical moment, he chopped down at the ground with all his strength and was able to stable himself right on the edge. By then, the fourth



thrust from Linghu Chong had arrived and the tip of the sword stopped inches short from his throat.

Tian Boguang's face was as white as a sheet of paper. Linghu Chong didn't let out a sound either and simply remained still with the sword tip right next to Tian's throat.

"Go ahead and kill me. What are you waiting for?" Tian Boguang yelled angrily after a long silence.

Linghu Chong pulled his right hand back and leapt several big steps backward.

"Brother Tian, you just had an oversight and permitted me to take the initiative. This one doesn't count. Let's fight again," he said.

Tian Boguang let out a loud snort and then waved his knife madly in a thunderstorm-like attack toward Linghu Chong.

"I'll attack first this time. I am not going to let you take advantage again," he shouted.

Seeing the fierce chop of the steel blade coming toward him, Linghu Chong jabbed his sword in an angle toward Tian Boguang's lower stomach while turning his upper body to dodge away from the sharp knife blade.

Realizing that Linghu Chong's thrust was quickly approaching him, Tian Boguang hurriedly turned his knife around and smacked it toward Linghu Chong's sword. Relying on his own exceptional strength, he thought that as soon as the knife and the sword collided, for sure he would be able to knock the long sword out of Linghu Chong's grip.

With the first thrust Linghu Chong was already able to take on the initiative. The second and the third thrust shot out continuously. Each thrust was accurate and effective, and his sword tip was never a second apart from his opponent's vital parts.

Tian Boguang didn't have enough time to parry off the attacks and had to take one step back after another. Who would have expected that after ten moves or so, he actually

followed the same old disastrous road and once again retreated to the very edge of the cliff?

Linghu Chong slashed down with his sword and forced Tian Boguang to wave his knife down to guard his lower portion body. At the meantime he reached out with his left hand and struck out in a claw hand. The claw hand struck with perfect timing and broke through from a flaw in Tian Boguang's defense line. Linghu Chong held the claw hand still, when his fingers were only two inches from Tian Boguang's Tan-Zhong Acupoint on his chest. He had sealed Tian Boguang's Tan-Zhong Acupoint twice before. Tian Boguang knew very well, that if Linghu Chong had struck out with his claw hand, he would have collapsed and his body would have fallen into the bottomless abyss this time instead of falling onto the ground. When Linghu Chong held his hand still, he was obviously giving ground.

The two both stayed still for a brief moment before Linghu Chong once again leapt back to yield.

Tian Boguang sat on a rock and meditated a short while with his eyes shut. Suddenly he shouted a loud roar as he launched his attack, chopping down vertically with mighty force. This time he took the surroundings into consideration and made sure his back was facing the mountain. He figured that even if he were forced into retreat, he would end up retreating into the cave. And without worrying about falling down the cliff, he could really fight it out.

By now Linghu Chong had a good grasp of the various variations in Tian Boguang's knife moves. When Tian's chop came, he dodged to the right, and at the meantime, slashed his long sword toward Tian Boguang's left shoulder. Tian Boguang circled his knife back to block, but Linghu Chong had already retracted his sword and thrust it at his left waist. Tian Boguang's left arm was only less than a foot away from his left waist. When he had circled his knife back, he was actually defending and launching a counter-attack at the same time, and to be able to execute his counter-attack, he

had attached much strength with the move, which sent the knife chopping out. In a hurry, he didn't have enough time to pull his knife back to guard his waist, so with no other choice, he took a half step to his right. Linghu Chong threw another thrust at Tian's right cheek. Tian Boguang hurriedly raised his knife to block when Linghu Chong's sword suddenly pointed at his left leg. Not able to block this one in time, either, Tian Boguang had to take another step to his right.

Linghu Chong continued with endless thrusts, all of which aimed at Tian Boguang's left side and forced him to retreat to his right one step after another. After about ten steps, Tian Boguang found himself near the end of the cliff where a big rock blocked his retreating route. Leaning his back against the rock wall, Tian Boguang simply waved his knife all around himself and paid no attention to how Linghu Chong might thrust his sword out. Tearing sounds came into his ears continuously as Linghu Chong's sword slashed six times on his left sleeve, left side of the robe, and the left leg of his pants. The entire six slashes only left cuts on his clothing without really touching his skin. Tian Boguang knew too well that any one of the six slashes could have cut his belly open or cut off his arm and leg. In the instant, Tian Boguang felt so disheartened and dispirited that it seemed as if all his hopes had died out. In unspeakable despair, he spewed out a mouthful of blood.

Within the short moment, Linghu Chong had succeeded in forcing Tian Boguang to the very edge between life and death three times in a roll. Linghu Chong almost couldn't believe it, himself. Just a few days ago, his opponent still had much superior Kung Fu than him, yet right now he had taken the lead and had his opponent completely in his power. He had won so easily that he didn't even have to use all his strength. Although he maintained his composure, deep in his heart, he was really enlightened beyond words. By the time Tian Boguang spurted out a mouthful of blood after the crushing defeat, remorse welled up in Linghu Chong's heart.

“Brother Tian,” he said, “victories and defeats are normal and common. Why are you taking it so hard? Didn’t I lose to you many times before?”

Tian Boguang threw his knife down and shook his head. “Senior grandmaster Feng has miraculous sword skills. No one will be a match for him in the entire world. I will never be a match for you again.”

“Brother Tian, you said it right. It was all because of Grand Uncle-Master Feng’s great advice, I was able to gain victory.” Linghu Chong picked up the knife and handed it back respectfully with both hands. “Grand Uncle-Master Feng hopes that you can grant him a request.”

“My life is at your mercy, what’s there to talk about?” Tian Boguang didn’t take the knife and mocked in a sad tone.

“Grand Uncle-Master has withdrawn from society and lived a hermit’s life for many years. He prefers not to be disturbed by vulgar people. When you, brother Tian, leaves Mount Huashan, would you please not mention the respectful Grand Uncle-Master’s name to anyone? I would really appreciate that,” Linghu Chong said.

“Why don’t you just stab me with your sword to rid the witness? Wouldn’t that be a lot easier?” Tian Boguang mocked coldly.

Linghu Chong took two steps back and slid his sword back to the sheath.

“Brother Tian, earlier when your Kung Fu skills were way ahead of mine, you could have whacked me with a single chop, and then this would never have happened. I am only asking a favor from you to not tell anyone else the whereabouts of my Grand Uncle-Master Feng. I dare not to mean any intimidation or offense,” he explained sincerely.

“Fine. I won’t.” Tian Boguang agreed.

“Many thanks to you, brother Tian!” Linghu Chong bowed deeply down.

“I have come to invite you down Mount Huashan as instructed. I guess that’s not going to work now, but we are

not done yet. I probably will never be able to beat you in a fight again in this life. I am not giving up though. This concerns my own life, so I would have no choice but to keep pestering you. You can't blame me for not being a true man. Brother Linghu, farewell for now." At the last word, Tian Boguang cupped his hands with a salute and then walked off.

Linghu Chong remembered the deadly poison that was planted in Tian Boguang's body. After Tian left Mount Huashan, the poison would soon become active and kill him. After so many fierce fights with him, Linghu Chong felt as if they were much closer unwittingly. He almost called out with an impulse, "I'll go with you." Then he remembered that he was still being punished on the "Cliff of Contemplation", and without Master's permission, he was not allowed to even take a step off the cliff. Besides, Tian was a rapist who did all kinds of evil. If he had left together with Tian, wouldn't he be wallowing in the mire with Tian? That would surely bring disgrace and ruin upon him and lead to endless trouble. With those thoughts, he held the words back and simply looked on as Tian Boguang descended down the path.

Linghu Chong went back into the cave and bowed down to the ground.

"Grand Uncle-Master, you not only saved my life, but also taught me superb sword techniques. How can I ever repay you for the kindness and grace?"

"Superb sword techniques, superb sword techniques! Hmm, it's still far from that." Feng Qingyang let out a smile, yet the smile was really in a mood of loneliness and depression.

"May I make bold to ask Grand Uncle-Master to teach me all of the Dugu Nine Swords techniques?" Linghu Chong pleaded.

"Are you sure you won't regret it later for learning the Dugu Nine Swords?" Feng Qingyang asked.

Linghu Chong was confused for a moment, thinking that why would he regret it later, then he quickly found an answer

and thought, "I see. The Dugu Nine Swords are not sword techniques from our own school. Grand Uncle-Master meant that Master might not approve it and punish me once he finds out about it. But Master never restricts me from learning other school's techniques for references. He has said before that stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade on this one - advice from others may help one overcome one's shortcomings. Besides, I have already learned many Heng-Shan, Hengshan, Taishan, and Songshan Sword Schools' sword moves from the drawings on the rock wall. I even learned some Demon Cult Ten Elders' Kung Fu. The Dugu Nine Swords Kung Fu is so magnificent. It is the kind of unraveled skill that us martial arts practitioner would crave about even in our dreams. I am really very lucky to have a senior grandmaster in our school who is willing to teach it to me."

"This is the most fortunate thing in my entire life. I would only feel grateful, never regrets," he said as he knelt down.

"Very well, I will teach you then. If I don't teach the Dugu Nine Swords to you, there probably wouldn't be Dugu Nine Swords left in this world a few years from now," Feng Qingyang said with a smile.

For a moment, his face showed traces of great delight, but soon they were replaced with a dreary expression. After a long pause, he finally continued.

"Tian Boguang definitely won't just give up so easy. Even if he decides to come back again, it's going to be at least ten to fifteen days from now. Your Kung Fu is already better than his, and you certainly have more tricks than he does. I don't think you'll ever be afraid of him again. We have plenty of time now, so you must study from the very beginning to ensure a solid foundation."

This time Feng Qingyang went through the script of the General Index Stance, the first stance of the Dugu Nine Swords, one sentence at a time, and explained in great details bundled with various variations that were

implementations of the script. Linghu Chong had simply memorized the script by ear without understanding most of the ideas and theories behind it. Now with Feng Qingyang's calm and unhurried explanation, he was able to comprehend many principles of advanced-level Kung Fu and several brilliant and profound variations every moment of it. He couldn't help but show his great happiness and great admiration throughout the time.

The old and the young went over the brilliant sword techniques in the Dugu Nine Swords atop the "Cliff of Contemplation." They started from General Index Stance and went on with Sword-breaking Stance, Knife-breaking Stance, Spear-breaking Stance, Mace-breaking Stance, Whip-breaking Stance, Palm-breaking Stance, and Missile-breaking Stance all the way till the ninth stance, Energy-breaking Stance.

The Spear-breaking Stance included techniques to overcome long weapons such as long-handled spear, long-handled halberd, snake-shaped spear, staff, fanged cudgel, white wax stick, Buddhist monk's staff, and Buddhist monk's spade.

The Mace-breaking Stance was used to overcome short weapons such as steel club, iron mace, acupoint-sealing peg, crutches, Emei<sup>1</sup> sting, dagger, war axe, iron plate, octagonal hammer, and iron awl.

The Whip-breaking stance was able to overcome flexible weapons such as long cord, whip, three-sectioned staff, chain spear, iron chain, fishing net, and meteor hammer.

Although each move was just one stance, it had endless variations. The more Linghu Chong learned, the more powerful it became when he comprehended the connections between each stance. The last three stances were the most difficult ones.

The Palm-breaking Stance overcame Kung Fu skills related to one's fists, legs, fingers, and palms. If the opponent were brave enough to fight against a sword with

bare hands, he had to have superb Kung Fu skills and that using a weapon or not was really no difference for him any more. There are many fist forms, leg forms, finger forms, and palm forms in the world, and all of them are very complex. The Palm-breaking Stance included techniques to overcome boxing and grappling, joint manipulation and acupoint sealing, demon claw and tiger claw hands, iron sand divine palm, and the type of barehanded Kung Fu skills.

The word “Missile” in the name of the Missile-breaking Stance included the many different kinds of missiles and projectiles. To be able to learn this stance, the practitioner must first learn the skill of distinguishing the type of the missile by ear. He not only should be capable of blocking the many kinds of missiles coming from the enemy with his long sword, but also redirecting the force in the missiles to send them back and injure the enemy with his own missiles.

When it came to the ninth stance, Energy-breaking Stance, Feng Qingyang only taught Linghu Chong the script and formula of how to practice it.

Feng Qingyang explained, “This stance is used to overcome opponents who have great inner energy. The essence of the move really depends on your own interpretation. When senior master Dugu took on the entire Martial World with this set of Dugu Nine Swords many years ago, he couldn’t even find a single person that could defeat him, that was all because he had reached the acme of perfection with the set of sword techniques. The same sword technique from the same Huashan style sword art could have very different effect and power. It’s the same with the Dugu Nine Swords. Even though you have learned the sword techniques, if you can’t perfect your skills, you would still be no match for first-class elite fighters in today’s world. You have already entered the field. If you prefer to win than lose, go practice hard for another twenty years, then you will be capable of competing with the key players in the world.”



The more Linghu Chong studied, the more he realized that there were endless variations in the nine stances, and it will take a very long time for him to actually probe all the profound knowledge in them. When he heard his Grand Uncle-Master saying that he still needed to work hard on practicing the sword techniques for at least twenty more years, he wasn't surprised at all.

"If I'm able to fully understand the idea left by senior master Dugu when he created the nine stances of Dugu Nine Swords, I would be overjoyed," he said.

"You don't have to unduly humble yourself. Great Master Dugu was one with extraordinary intelligence. To be able to master his sword techniques, the key lies on the word 'comprehension,' not simply memorizing mechanically. Once you understand the essence of the sword techniques, you can use it anyway you want. Even if you have forgotten all the variations completely, it wouldn't matter anyway. And when you are in a real fight, the more you forget about them, the less you will be restricted by the original sword stances. You are good Kung Fu material, just the right kind to learn this set of sword techniques. Humph, in today's world, I doubt that there's really any extraordinary hero out there. You should remain diligent in your studies. I am leaving now," Feng Qingyang said.

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. "Grand Uncle-Master, where...where are you going?" his voice quivering, he asked anxiously.

"I have been living by the back side of Mount Huashan for decades. I just had a sudden impulse earlier and came out of my cave to teach you the set of sword techniques, hoping that senior master Dugu's unrivalled and superb Kung Fu wouldn't get rotten together with me. Of course it's time to go back now," Feng Qingyang said.

"Grand Uncle-Master, so you live right by the back side of the mountain. That's wonderful! I can serve upon you days

and nights to help rid your lonesomeness,” Linghu Chong said happily.

“Starting from now on, I will never see anyone from the Huashan Sword School. Even you are not an exception,” Feng Qingyang said sternly.

Seeing the frightened and confused look on Linghu Chong’s face, he changed into a softer tone.

“Chong, fate brought us together, and you are very to my liking. I am truly very delighted to have you, such a wonderful boy, to carry on my sword techniques in my old age. If you still think I am your Grand Uncle-Master, then don’t come looking for me to make things difficult.”

“Grand Uncle-Master, why?” Linghu Chong felt great sorrow in his heart.

“Don’t even tell your Master that you have seen me.” Feng Qingyang shook his head.

“I will follow your instructions,” Linghu Chong said as tear started to emerge in his eyes.

“Good kid, good kid!” Feng Qingyang stroked Linghu Chong’s head gently and then turned around to go down the cliff.

Linghu Chong followed him all the way till the edge of the cliff. Seeing Feng Qingyang’s thin figure receding down the cliff and eventually disappearing in the back mountain, he couldn’t help but feel deep sorrow and grief.

During the ten days or so Linghu Chong spent with Feng Qingyang, even though all they discussed about were sword techniques, he admired Feng Qingyang’s demeanor with all his heart. On top of that, he also felt that Feng seemed to be so close to him and the two were indescribably congenial. Feng Qingyang was really a Grand Uncle-Master of his who was two generations higher than him, yet deep inside Linghu Chong’s heart, he vaguely felt a kind of affection as if Feng was a good friend in his same age group who he had wished to meet all along. Comparing to his relationship to his

respectful Master, Yue Buqun, this one seemed to be much closer instead.

“When this Grand Uncle-Master was still young, he probably had the same kind of temper just like me, fearing nothing, carefree, and tending to do things following one’s free will,” Linghu Chong thought. “When he taught me sword techniques, he always liked to say that ‘it’s the person using the sword techniques, not the sword techniques using the person’ and ‘a person is alive, but sword techniques are not, so an alive person shouldn’t be restrained by dead sword techniques.’ That principle is so true. Why did Master never say anything close to that?” He pondered over it for a while and then got his own answer. “Of course Master knows about this principle. It’s just that he knows well that I am too carefree and is afraid that once he tells me the principle, I would go on wild imaginations to create a mass and won’t follow the rules step by step when I practice sword art. Once I get to a certain level with my sword skills, Master will then explain everything in details. Apprentice brothers and sisters aren’t there with their level of Kung Fu skills, so of course it would be even more difficult for them to understand the principle of advanced sword art. It would be a waste of time telling them.” Then his mind slipped into a different thought. “Grand Uncle-Master’s sword skill has really reached the acme of perfection. What a pity it is that he never showed his true skills so I could broaden my horizons. Compared to Master, Grand Uncle Master’s sword skill must be another level up.”

He remembered that Feng Qingyang’s face was always covered by depression. He figured, “During the last ten days or so, Grand Uncle-Master would occasionally heave deep sighs. Obviously he had some kind of a big tragedy in his mind. I wonder what happened to him.” He heaved a sigh himself and then went out the cave to practice.

He practiced for a while and then randomly threw out a thrust. It turned out to be the Graceful Phoenix move from

Huashan style sword art. He paused for a second and shook his head in a wry smile.

“Wrong!” he said to himself and then continued on. Not long after, he threw out another random thrust, and it turned out to be Graceful Phoenix once again. He couldn’t help but get mad at himself.

“Because I know sword moves from our sword school very well, and all those moves are already deep-rooted in my mind, as soon as I become careless, I would naturally add the familiar moves from our school into it. Then it’s not Dugu Nine Swords anymore.”

Suddenly a thought flashed by his mind. “Grand Uncle-Master told me to have no restraints and follow the natural flow, then why couldn’t I use sword moves from my own school? And furthermore, why couldn’t I add Hengshan, Taishan, or other schools’ sword moves, or even Demon Cult Ten Elders’ Kung Fu into it? If I insisted on separating them, using only certain type of sword art, not another certain type of sword art, then I am really putting restraints onto myself.”

After figuring that out, he just randomly threw out different moves. If it followed the natural flow, he would mix sword moves from his own school or moves from the rock wall together. Instantly, he felt endless fun. The sword moves from the five different mountain sword schools were quite different from each other, and the ten Demon Cult Elders also came from six or seven different sects. It was almost impossible to mix moves from so many different styles. After practicing for some moments, he was still not able to merge them together.

“If I can’t merge them together, so what? Why do I have to?” he suddenly realized. So he stopped worrying about what move it was and as soon as he thought of a move, he would simply mix it into the Dugu Nine Swords as he pleased. However, out of all those moves, Graceful Phoenix was still the one he used the most. He practiced some more and then threw another random thrust. Not to his surprise, it was Graceful Phoenix once again.

“What might little apprentice sister say once she sees how I am executing that Graceful Phoenix?” he suddenly thought.

He held his sword still as a gentle and soft smile broke out on his face. During the last few days, he had been studying and practicing sword arts with all his heart, even in his dreams he had been only thinking about the various variations of the Dugu Nine Swords. Now when he suddenly remembered Yue Lingshan, lovesick quickly welled up in his heart.

“I wonder if she is still teaching apprentice brother Lin sword art secretly. Master has strict orders, but little apprentice sister has always been very bold. Relying on Master-Wife’s spoiling, she probably started teaching again. Even if she’s not teaching sword art, they see each other days and nights, so of course they will become even closer.”

Gradually, the gentle smile changed into a wry smile, and eventually there was not a trace of happiness left on his face. Feeling quite depressed, he slid his sword back into the sheath slowly.

Suddenly Lu Dayou’s shouting voice rose. “Big apprentice brother! Big apprentice brother!” His voice was filled with worry.

“Oh no! Tian Boguang went down the cliff after a crushing defeat. He had said that he was not going to give up and would keep pestering to the very end. Could it be that since he can’t beat me in a fight, he had taken little apprentice sister into hostage so he could force me to surrender?” Linghu Chong was stunned.

He rushed by the edge of the cliff and looked down. Flustered and exasperated, Lu Dayou ran toward the cliff, the food basket in his hands.

“Big...big apprentice brother...big...apprentice brother, this is not good!” Lu Dayou shouted.

“What? What happened to little apprentice sister?” Linghu Chong asked hurriedly, even more worried.

Lu Dayou jumped up the cliff, and after sitting the food basket on a big rock, he said, "Little apprentice sister? Little apprentice sister is just fine. This is terrible. I think it's going to be trouble."

Hearing that little apprentice sister was just fine, Linghu Chong felt quite relieved. "What trouble?" he asked.

"Master and Master-Wife came back." Lu Dayou panted.

Linghu Chong was quite delighted. "Bah! Isn't it a great thing that Master and Master-Wife have come back? Why are you saying that it's going to be trouble? Nonsense!" he reproached.

"No, no, you don't understand. Right after Master and Master-Wife came back, before they even had a chance to rest, many people came to pay a visit, and among the people coming, there are ones from the Songshan Sword School, the Hengshan Sword School, and the Taishan Sword School," Lu Dayou explained.

"Our five sword schools are all members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. It's quite normal when people from the Songshan Sword School and the others come to pay a visit to Master," Linghu Chong said.

"No, no...you don't know. There are three others that came together with them and claimed to be part of our Huashan Sword School, but Master doesn't call them apprentice brothers."

"Really? What do those three look like?" Linghu Chong asked, feeling slightly surprised.

"One of them has a yellowish face and claimed to have a surname of Feng,<sup>2</sup> and called something like Feng Buping. Then another one is a Taoist priest; the third one is a short guy. Both of them are called 'Bu' something. I guess they are really ones in the 'Bu' class."

"Maybe they are traitors of our school and had been expelled out of the school a long time ago." Linghu Chong nodded.

“Yeah! You guessed it right. As soon as Master saw them, he became very displeased and said to them, ‘Brother Feng, all three of you have had your connection with Huashan Sword School dropped a long time ago. Why are you coming back to Mount Huashan again?’ Then that Feng Buping said, ‘Apprentice brother Yue, did you buy out Mount Huashan? Are you not allowing other people to come up Mount Huashan? Or did the Emperor grant it to you?’ Master snorted and then said, ‘If you are just touring around Mount Huashan, of course you have your freedom. Yue Buqun is no longer your apprentice brother. I’ll have to send the words ‘apprentice brother Yue’ right back to you.’ Feng Buping said, ‘Your Master used schemes and intrigues to seize control of the Huashan Sword School many years ago. We’ll have to square the old accounts today. You don’t want me to call you ‘apprentice brother Yue.’ Humph, after we square the old accounts, even if you kneel in front of me to beg for it, I wouldn’t grant you the wish.’”

“Oh,” Linghu Chong replied, thinking that Master really had trouble this time.

“Us apprentices all got angry at those words.” Lu Dayou continued. “Little apprentice sister was the first one to yell out. Who would have thought that Master-Wife had a real soft temper this time? She didn’t allow little apprentice sister to make any noises. Master obviously didn’t take them too seriously. He said dryly, ‘You want to square accounts? What accounts do you want to square? How do you want to square?’ Feng Buping said loudly, ‘You have usurped the Head Master post of the Huashan Sword School for over twenty years. Haven’t you had enough of it already? Don’t you think it’s time to step down now?’ Master answered with a smile, ‘So all of you took on all the trouble to line up here just so that you can seize my post of Head Master. What’s there to cherish? Brother Feng, if you think you are capable of the Head Master post, of course I can step aside.’ Feng Buping said, ‘Your Master usurped our sword school’s Head

Master post using schemes and intrigues many years ago. I have already petitioned to the Five Mountains Sword Alliance Chief Zuo and received the Command Flag to become the new Head Master of the Huashan Sword School in his command.' He took out a small flag from his chest pocket and extended it out. It is indeed the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance."

"Isn't Alliance Chief Zuo a bit too impetuous to think he has the authority here? This is an internal affair of the Huashan Sword School. We don't need him to poke his nose in that matter. What right has him to decide who should be the Head Master of our Huashan Sword School?" Linghu Chong shouted angrily.

"That's right! Master-Wife said the same thing. But that Lu-named old guy from the Songshan Sword School, Crane Hands Lu Bai, you know, the old folk we saw at Uncle-Master Liu's house in Hengshan, he spared no effort backing up that Feng Buping saying that the Feng-named guy should become the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School and argued again and again with Master-Wife. And those two guys from the Taishan Sword School and the Hengshan Sword School, this is so annoying, also ganged up with Feng Buping. The three schools of theirs have decided to gang up to give trouble to our Huashan Sword School. Heng-Shan Sword School is the only one that doesn't have anyone involved. Big...big apprentice brother, I figured this is going to be big trouble, that's why I came in a rush to let you know."

"When our school has trouble, as long as us apprentices can still breathe, we are all willing to die for Master. Six apprentice brother, let's go!" Linghu Chong shouted.

"Right! When Master sees that you are working for him, for sure he won't blame you for leaving the cliff without permission," Lu Dayou exclaimed.

"It's alright even if Master do blame me. Master is a courteous gentleman, and he doesn't like to argue with



others. Maybe he will actually let someone have the post of Head Master. Wouldn't that be terrible...?" Linghu Chong started rushing down the cliff using his Qing-Gong.

In the middle of running, Linghu Chong suddenly heard somebody shouting from the mountain path in front of him.

"Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! Where are you?"

"Who is calling my name?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Are you Linghu Chong?" several voices asked in unison.

"That's right!" Linghu Chong answered.

Suddenly two shadows flashed by and blocked in the middle of the road. The mountain path was very narrow and on one side of the path was the ten-thousand-feet deep bottomless valley. When the two men showed up so abruptly on the mountain path all of a sudden, Linghu Chong was in the middle of a fast dash and almost bumped into them. He stopped abruptly and found himself only a foot away from the two. The two faces were both very bumpy and wrinkly and looked very frightening. In great surprise, Linghu Chong immediately turned around and leapt back ten feet or so, shouting, "Who are you?" But to his great astonishment, he found another two extremely ugly faces, also bumpy and wrinkly, blocking his way. The two faces were less than half-a-foot from his face, and their noses almost touched his nose. Linghu Chong immediately took a step to his side and again found two more people standing by his side between him and the bottomless abyss. Their faces were also very similar to the previous four.

Having bumped into six freaks all of a sudden, Linghu Chong was at a loss as what to do, and his heart pounded like a drum. Within the split of a second, the six freaks had jostled him into a three-inch wide small space. The breaths of the two in front of him had already reached his face. He could also feel warm air on his back neck. Apparently it was because of the breathing from the two behind him. In a hurry, he reached for his sword. However, as soon as his finger touched the handle of the sword, the six freaks took a

half step forward all at the same time and jostled with their bodies toward the middle. Instantly, Linghu Chong was squeezed into such a tight space that he couldn't even move an inch.

"Hey, hey! What are you guys doing?" Lu Dayou's voice rose from behind him.

Even though Linghu Chong had a bag full of tricks, at the moment, he was scared out of wits. Those six freaks looked almost like trolls or monsters, and not only did they have scary looks, their behaviors were even more freaky. Linghu Chong tried hard to open his arms so he could push away the two in front of him, but with his arms being jostled down, he had no way of pushing.

"They must be villains together with Feng Buping's group," he thought to himself hurriedly.

His entire body felt the great pressure; he couldn't even breathe. The four freaks kept jostling toward the middle and soon Linghu Chong's joints started popping. Not daring to stare right into the eyes of the freak right in front of him, Linghu Chong quickly shut his eyes tight. Then he heard a screeching voice.

"Linghu Chong, we'll take you to see the little nun."

"Oh, no! So they are Tian Boguang's gang." Linghu Chong thought to himself.

"If you don't let go of me, I'll commit suicide with my sword! Linghu Chong would rather die...!" he shouted.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong felt two hands grabbing onto both of his arms. The grips were as tight as clamps. Even though he had learned the Dugu Nine Swords, he had no means of using it at all. He groaned inwardly.

"The good little nun wants to see you. Behave yourself. Be a good kid, too," another voice rose.

"It would not be good if you become dead. If you commit suicide, I'll beat you half dead half alive," a third one said.

"He would be completely dead already. Why would you still beat him half dead half alive?" someone else argued.

"If you want to scare him, don't let him hear you. Once he hears it, he won't fall for it," another one commented.

"I just like to scare him, what are you gonna do about it?" the previous one mocked.

"I think it's better to talk him into behaving himself," another one suggested.

"I said to scare him, and I will scare him," the previous one said.

"I like to talk him out of it," that another one insisted.

The two actually went on arguing against each other nonstop.

Linghu Chong listened as the two argued foolishly. He was both greatly shocked and annoyed. He thought to himself, "The six freaks have very high Kung Fu skills, however, they seemed to be really stupid." So he shouted, "It's useless to try to scare me or talk me out of it. If you don't let go of me, I'll bite off my tongue and kill myself."

Suddenly, great pain came from his cheeks. Someone had grabbed onto his jaw.

"This guy is really stubborn. If he bites off his tongue, he won't be able to talk. The little nun won't like that for sure," one voice said.

"If he bites off his tongue, he would be dead. Why would it matter if he can still talk or not?" another one argued.

"He might not die. If you don't believe me, you can bite your own to try it out," a third one suggested.

"I said he would die, so I won't bite off my own tongue. Why don't you try it out?" the previous one mocked.

"Why should I bite my own tongue off? I got it. Let him try it," the one spoke before him replied.

There came a loud cry from Lu Dayou. Apparently those freaks had captured him.

"You, bite off your own tongue and let's see if you will die or not? Hurry up! Bite!" one freak yelled.

"I won't! If I bite my tongue off, I'd be dead for sure," Lu Dayou shouted.

"That's right! If one bites his tongue off, he would be dead for sure! Even he said so too," one of the freaks said.

"He's not dead yet. His words are not dependable," another one argued.

"He didn't bite off his tongue, so of course he won't die. If he did, he would die!" a third one commented.

Linghu Chong gathered his strength and jerked his arms abruptly. Instantly the pain from his wrists went deep into his marrow, yet he was still not even able to move a single bit. In the instant, he suddenly hit upon a way out of the trouble. He let out a loud scream and then pretended to be out cold. The six freaks all cried out in surprise. The one who grabbed at Linghu Chong's cheeks immediately let go of them.

"He was scared to death!" a freak commented.

"He can't be scared to death. He's not that big of a loser," another one disagreed.

"Even if he's dead, he wasn't scared to death," a third one suggested.

"Then how did he die?" the previous one asked.

Lu Dayou actually believed that they had tortured big apprentice brother to death and burst into a loud cry.

"I think he was scared to death," a freak insisted.

"You grabbed him too hard. He was grabbed to death," another one suggested.

"How on earth did he die?" a third one questioned.

"I shut down my arteries and killed myself!" Linghu Chong shouted loudly.

The six freaks were shocked when they suddenly heard Linghu Chong talking, then they all broke into loud laughs and said, "Aha, he's not dead. He was pretending to be dead."

"I wasn't pretending. After I died I came back to life again," Linghu Chong claimed.

"Do you really know how to shut down your arteries? That must be a very difficult Kung Fu. Will you teach me?" a freak asked.

"The Shut Down Your Own Arteries Kung Fu is very advanced. This dude doesn't know it. He's lying to you," another freak said.

"Did you say I don't know it? If I don't know it, how could I have shut down my arteries and killed myself earlier?" Linghu Chong challenged.

"Well...well...that's really odd." The freak scratched his head and didn't know how to answer.

Linghu Chong now was sure that even though the six freaks had excellent Kung Fu skills, their brains were certainly dull-witted to the extreme. So he said, "If you don't let go of me, I am going to shut down my arteries again. After I die this time, I won't be able to come back to life any more."

The two freaks that had been grabbing onto Linghu Chong's wrists tightly immediately let go of him and said in unison, "You can't die. If you die, it would be terrible."

"Well, if you don't want me dead, you'll have to move aside and let me through. I got to take care of some important business," Linghu Chong suggested.

The two freaks blocking his way shook their heads at the same time, both to the left and then both to the right. "No way! No way! You have to come with us to see the little nun," they said in unison.

Linghu Chong gathered his inner energy and jumped up, hoping to be able to jump over the two freaks' heads. But to his surprise, the two freaks also jumped up in great speed and their two bodies made a flying wall that blocked Linghu Chong's path again. Linghu Chong's body bumped with the two freaks' bodies and fell back down to the ground.

While still in mid-air, Linghu Chong had already grabbed hold of his sword handle. He waved his arm to draw his sword, but suddenly felt great burdens on both of his shoulders. The two freaks behind him had each reached out with an arm and placed a hand on each of his shoulders. His sword was only about a foot out of the sheath and he simply could not draw it out. The two hands on his shoulders each

seemed to have weighed hundreds of pounds. His body was immediately pushed lower. He couldn't even stand straight, not mentioning drawing his sword.

"Let's carry him away!" after the two freaks pushed him down onto the ground, they suggested with big smiles.

The two freaks in front of Linghu Chong each reached out with a hand to grab onto his ankles and picked him off the ground.

"Hey! Hey! What are you doing?" Lu Dayou shouted.

"This chap is so annoying. Let's kill him!" a freak suggested and raised his palm high, ready to strike down onto Lu Dayou's head.

"Don't kill him! Don't kill him!" Linghu Chong cried out loudly.

"Alright, I'll listen to you. I won't kill him. I'll seal his Mute Acupoint instead," that freak replied. He didn't even bother turning around and simply pointed backward with his finger. In a whistling sound, he had sealed Lu Dayou's Mute Acupoint with a beam of energy. Lu Dayou was in the middle of screaming, but the scream suddenly stopped abruptly as if someone had cut his scream off using a pair of scissors, and his body immediately huddled up.

Linghu Chong had rarely seen such accuracy and mighty power demonstrated in the freak's acupoint-sealing skills; he couldn't help but show great admiration.

"Excellent Kung Fu!" he praised.

The freak was greatly pleased. "This is nothing! I have a lot more cool Kung Fu skills. Let me demonstrate a few of them for you," he said with a big smile.

If it were in normal days, Linghu Chong would have wanted to broaden his horizons, but at the moment he really worried about his Master's safety and was very anxious.

"I don't want to watch!" he shouted.

"Why don't you want to watch? You'll have to watch!" the freak said angrily.

He jumped into the air and flew over Linghu Chong and the four freaks holding Linghu Chong like a big bird. His body maintained a horizontal position when he flew in the air and looked as if he was a swallow gliding in the air with beautiful postures.

“Beautiful!” Linghu Chong couldn’t help but blurt out another praise.

The freak landed back to the ground smoothly and gently, without even bringing up any dust. By the time he turned around, great smiles piled up on his long horsy face.

“This is really nothing! I’ve got a lot more even better than that,” he said happily.

He was at least somewhere close to sixty or seventy years old, yet his temper and the way he behaved was just like a little kid that wanted to keep showing off as soon as someone praised him. The superb and profound Kung Fu and the childish and naïve behavior of him happened to be on the exact opposite in extreme.

Linghu Chong thought, “Master and Master-Wife are in trouble right now surrounded by tough enemy. The enemy has all those Songshan Sword School, Taishan Sword School, and the bunch of elite fighters to back him, even if I go over there, the situation wouldn’t be approved much. Why don’t I trick these freaks into going over there to help Master and Master-Wife out?” So he shook his head and said, “You guys’ little Kung Fu is far from good enough to show off here on Mount Huashan.”

“Far from good enough? What are you talking about? You got caught by us, didn’t you?” that freak rebuffed.

“I am just a nobody in the Huashan Sword School. What’s so difficult to beat me? Right now, there are many elite master hands from Songshan Sword School, Taishan Sword School, Hengshan Sword School, and Huashan Sword School gathered here at Mount Huashan. Of course you guys wouldn’t be brave enough to go provoke them, would you?” Linghu Chong bluffed.

"Why would we be afraid to provoke them? Where are they?" the freak asked.

"We won the bet with that little nun, so the little nun asked us to come get Linghu Chong. She never asked us to provoke any elite master hands from the Songshan Sword School or the Taishan Sword School. We should only do one favor for one win. If we do too many favors, it's not worth it. Let's go," another one suggested.

Hearing those words, Linghu Chong felt very relieved. "It turned out that they were sent by little apprentice sister Yilin. Then they must not be enemies of mine. It seemed that they had lost a bet and thus had to come to get me. It's funny that they still want to save their faces and claim to have actually won the bet instead."

"That's a good idea," he said. "The elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School said that he looked down the most upon those six old freaks with horsy faces that looked like tangerine skins, and as soon as he sees the six of them, he would nip them dead one by one like nipping puny ants. Too bad that as soon as those six old freaks hear his voice, they all immediately ran far way and there was no way for him to find them."

At these words, the six freaks roared in great outrage. The four of them who had been carrying Linghu Chong sat him back down on the ground and then shouted all together.

"Where is this guy? Take us to him. We'd like a fight with him."

"What about the Songshan Sword School or the Taishan Sword School? Humph! Peach Valley's Six Fairies think nothing of them."

"Is he insane or something? How dare he nip Peach Valley's Six Fairies dead like nipping puny ants?"

"Well, you call yourselves Peach Valley's Six Fairies, but he kept on calling you Peach Valley's Six Trolls, or sometimes Peach Valley's Six Kids. I'd advise the Six Fairies of you to better stay as far away from him as possible. That guy's Kung



Fu is so vicious. You don't stand a chance fighting him," Linghu Chong added.

"No way! No way! Let's go fight him and see who's better," a freak shouted out.

"I think this doesn't look too good. If that elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School dares to say so, he must have superb skills to back himself up. He had called us Peach Valley's Six Kids, then he probably is a senior master of ours, and we probably can't beat him in a fight. The less trouble we have to deal with, the better. Why don't we go back now?" another freak suggested.

"Sixth brother has the least guts. We haven't even had the fight yet. How do you know we can't beat him?" another one exclaimed.

"What if he really can nip us dead like nipping ants? Wouldn't that be real bad luck? And after we fight him, we'd all be nipped dead already, how could we run away by then?" the coward freak asked.

"That's right!" Linghu Chong laughed out loud inwardly. "If you want to run away, you need to hurry up. If he gets the news and then comes after you, you won't have enough time to run away by then."

Hearing these words, the coward freak immediately started running. Only after a blurry flash, he had already vanished from everyone's sight.

"Wow, he's gotten really excellent Qing-Gong skills." Linghu Chong thought to himself in surprise.

"Sixth brother has no guts. It's alright that he ran away. We'll go fight that elite master hand from the Songshan Sword School," a freak proposed.

"Let's go! Let's go! Peach Valley's Six Fairies are undefeatable! Why would we be afraid of him?" the rest of the freaks all agreed.

"Hurry up and take us over there. Let's see how he'll nip us dead like nipping puny ants," a freak said as he patted on Linghu Chong's shoulder gently.

“Well, I can take you over, but as a true man, I, Linghu Chong, will never let others force me into doing things. I really resented it when I heard that Songshan Sword School elite master hand ridicule the six of you left and right. Also because I admired the superb Kung Fu of yours very much, that’s why I am volunteering to take you over there from a sense of justice so you can get even with him. If you force me to do this or that simply because you have more bodies here, I’ll never do it even if I have to die!” Linghu Chong announced.

“Great! You have quite some integrity and sharp eyes too to be able to see that the six brothers of us have superb Kung Fu skills. We brothers admire you too!” the five freaks all applauded.

“If so, I’d be glad to take you guys over there. When you see him, you must not speak or act irresponsibly, so people in the Martial World won’t hold you guys for ridicule and say that Peach Valley Six Fairies are naive, childish and lack common sense. You have to all listen to my instructions, otherwise, you will make me lose face greatly and we’ll all look stupid,” Linghu Chong said.

He was just testing water here. Who would have thought that the five freaks immediately agreed with no complaints whatsoever?

“That’s perfect! We can’t ever let others call us, Peach Valley’s Six Fairies, naive, childish and lack common sense!” the five of them answered in unison.

Apparently they have heard those words “naive, childish and lack common sense” many times already, and considered them very embarrassing comments. Linghu Chong’s words were almost like music to their ears.

“Good. Will you please follow me?” Linghu Chong nodded at them and then hurried down the mountain path.

The five freaks followed right behind Linghu Chong carrying Lu Dayou with them. Only after a couple of miles, they found the coward freak popping his head up and down

to peek out from behind a big rock. Linghu Chong figured that this one definitely needed some encouragement, so he said to him.

"That Songshan Sword School's old folk's Kung Fu is far from yours. You don't need to be afraid of him. We are going there to kick his ass. Why don't you come with us?"

"Great! I am going too!" the freak said with great joy. However, he immediately asked again, "Well, you said that his Kung Fu is far from mine. Is his Kung Fu far better than mine or far worse?" He was quite timid, so naturally he was very cautious.

"Of course yours is far better than his. When you were running earlier, I could tell that you have outstanding Qing-Gong skills. That old folk from the Songshan Sword School will never be able to keep up with you," Linghu Chong said with a grin.

That freak was very pleased and decided to join the group, walking next to Linghu Chong, but he still wasn't too sure about it, and asked, "What if he did catch up with me? What then?"

"I'll always be by your side, and if he ever dares to catch up with you, humph! Humph!" Linghu Chong pulled his sword half a foot out of the sheath and then snapped it back in with a forceful push. "I'll whack him with a single thrust!" he said.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Hey, you have to keep your words!" the freak said with great joy!

"Of course! If he can't keep up with you, then I don't need to kill him," Linghu Chong promised.

"Sure! If he can't keep up with me, then we'll let him go." The freak smiled happily.

Linghu Chong laughed hard inwardly. He thought to himself, "Once you start running, I am sure it wouldn't be an easy task to keep up with you!" He then figured, "These six old folks are unsophisticated and honest. They aren't bad

guys. It wouldn't be a bad idea to make acquaintances with them." So he spoke again.

"Six Fairies, your names have long resounded in my ears! Today I finally get to meet all of you. And sure enough, you all live up to your reputation. I was wondering what are the respectful names of the six of you?"

The six freaks had no idea that what Linghu Chong just said was totally illogical, and as soon as they heard him saying that their names had long resounded in his ears, all were wild with joy.

"I am the big brother. My name is Peachtree Root Fairy," one said.

"I am the second. My name is Peachtree Trunk Fairy," another one said.

"I am either the third or the fourth. My name is Peachtree Branch Fairy," a third one said. He pointed at a fourth one and said, "He is either the third or the fourth. His name is Peachtree Leaf Fairy."

"How come you don't even know if you are the third or the fourth yourselves?" Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

"It's not that we don't know. It's because my mom and dad forgot about it," Branch Fairy explained.

"When your mom and dad gave birth to you, if they forgot that they had ever given birth to you, as a little kid, how would you know if there's a you in the world?" Leaf Fairy interrupted.

"Right! Right! Luckily my parents remembered that they gave birth to me." Linghu Chong nodded while working hard to hold his laugh.

"Here you go!" Leaf Fairy said.

"So how did your parents forget about it?" Linghu Chong asked.

"At the time when Mom and Dad gave birth to us, the two brothers, they remembered who was the elder one and who was the younger one, however, they forgot about it a few years later. That's why we don't really know who is the third

and who is the fourth,” Leaf Fairy said. He pointed at Branch Fairy and said, “He really wanted to be the third, and if I don’t call him third brother, he would start a fist fight with me. So I had to let him have it.”

“So you are two brothers.” Linghu Chong smiled.

“Yeah! We are six brothers!” Branch Fairy said.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Well, parents are dumb parents, no wonder they gave birth to six dumb sons.”

“What are you two’s names?” Linghu Chong asked the rest two.

“Let me tell him. I am the sixth. My name is Peachtree Fruit Fairy. My fifth brother is named Peachtree Flower Fairy,” the coward freak announced.

Linghu Chong was unable to stifle a laugh, thinking, “The Peachtree Flower Fairy has such an ugly face. He really has nothing even comparable to a peach tree flower.”

Seeing Linghu Chong’s smiling face, Flower Fairy said happily, “Among the six brothers, my name is the most beautiful one. Theirs are no match for mine!”

“Peachtree Flower Fairy is such a pleasant name, and Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, Peachtree Leaf, and Peachtree Fruit are all beautiful names too. Wonderful! Wonderful! If I could have a name so beautiful and pleasant, I’d be delighted beyond words.”

Every one of the six Fairies felt unspeakable happiness and couldn’t help but dance with joy, feeling that Linghu Chong was truly the number one nice guy in the world.

“Let’s keep going now. Will one of the Peachtree brothers please open my apprentice brother’s acupoint? Your acupoint-sealing techniques are way too advanced for me. There’s no way I’ll be able to open his acupoint all by myself,” Linghu Chong said with a smile.

Each getting a flattery, Peach Valley Six Fairies immediately vied with each other in rushing by Lu Dayou to open his sealed acupoints.

From the “Cliff of Contemplation” to the “House of Integrity” of the Huashan Sword School, it was somewhere between three or four miles. Other than Lu Dayou, everybody had good Qing-Gong skills and it took them almost no time to arrive at the outside of “House of Integrity.” As soon as they got there, Linghu Chong saw Lao Denuo, Liang Fa, Shi Daizi, Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi, and the bunch of dozens of apprentice brothers and sisters all standing outside of the hall way looking quite worried. Seeing that the big apprentice brother had arrived, everyone felt a bit relieved.

Lao Denuo greeted them and whispered to Linghu Chong, “Big apprentice brother, Master and Master-Wife are greeting guests inside.”

Linghu Chong turned his head back and signaled Peach Valley Six Fairies to not make any sound while they stand there waiting.

“Those six are my friends. You don’t have to worry about them. Let me go have a look,” he whispered to Lao Denuo and then peeked inside from the crack of the hall windows.

Normally when Yue Buqun and Madam Yue greet guests, apprentices would never have peeked in from the outside, however, since the Huashan Sword School was in great trouble right now, all the apprentices didn’t think what Linghu Chong did was anything inappropriate at all.

# **Chapter 11: Energy Streams**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**In a state of wooziness, Linghu Chong felt agitating pain from his chest, and his blood seemed to have gone in every direction, it was such an undesirable discomfort. After a long while, he gradually gained back his consciousness. His body seemed to have been roasted in a huge oven. He could not help groaning. Then he heard someone saying, "Be quiet."**

Linghu Chong peeked inside the hall. A tall, thin old man sat at the guest of honor seat. He was holding the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance in his right hand; it was none other than "Crane Hands" Lu Bai from the Songshan School. A middle-aged Taoist Priest and an old man in his fifties sat next to him. Their clothing suggested that one belonged to the Taishan School and the other one the Hengshan School. Next to them sat three more people all in their fifties or sixties and each had a Huashan School style long sword hanging by his waist. The first one had a yellowish face with a stern look. He was probably the Feng Buping that Lou Dayou had mentioned earlier. Master and Master-Wife sat at the host seats in accompany. Tea and light refreshments occupied most of the tabletop.

"Brother Yue," the old man from the Hengshan School said, "we outsiders really shouldn't interfere with the internal affairs of your respectful school. However, because our five sword schools have joined the alliance to share both honor and disgrace, if one school didn't handle things well and became the laughing stock of fellow martial people, the other four schools would be disgraced as well. Earlier, Madam Yue said that the three schools, Songshan, Taishan, and Hengshan should only mind their own business. I think that was inaccurate." His two eyes were almost completely yellow as if he had a yellow fever.

"They are still in the middle of the dispute. Master hasn't given up and stepped down from his post yet." Linghu Chong felt some relief.

“Apprentice brother Lu, it sounds like you are determined that our Huashan School is not handling things properly and that has implicated your respectful school’s reputation, aren’t you?” Madam Yue asked.

The old man Lu from the Hengshan School sneered. “I’ve long heard that Heroine Ning is the backstage Head Master of the Huashan School. I didn’t want to believe it before, but after having the pleasure to meet you today, I have to agree that it is really a well-deserved reputation.”

“Apprentice brother Lu, you’ve come here to Mount Huashan as a guest. I don’t want to offend you because that would be an inappropriate way to treat a guest. Who would have expected such absurd nonsense from a famous master of the Hengshan School? When I see Great Mr. Mo next time, I’m sure I will discuss about this with him,” Madam Yue rebuffed angrily.

“Madam Yue, so you are holding off your offense only because I am a guest here, and if this wasn’t Mount Huashan, you would have slashed your sword toward my head, wouldn’t you?” the old man Lu said with a sneer.

“I wouldn’t dare.” Madam Yue replied. “How dare our Huashan School interfere with the internal affair of your respectful school? When people from your respectful school collaborate with the Demon Cult, there’s always Alliance Chief Zuo of the Songshan School to clean him out for you. What’s the need for our Huashan School to get involved?”

Hengshan School’s Liu Zhengfeng and Demon Cult Elder Qu Yang died outside of Hengshan Town together. It had become public knowledge in the Martial World that the Songshan School was responsible for it. Madam Yue specifically mentioned the incident here, to first jab at the old man Lu’s sore spot, and secondly, to ridicule him, implying that he not only didn’t have any grievance of losing an apprentice brother to the Songshan School, but instead, came together with the Songshan School people to give trouble to the Yue Couple.

The old man Lu immediately put on a stern face. "Throughout the ages, which school is immune of unworthy apprentices?" he screeched. "That's exactly the reason why we have come to Mount Huashan today, to uphold justice and help brother Feng clean out the evil bunch in the school."

"Who is the evil bunch? My husband Yue Buqun's nickname is 'Gentleman Sword.' What's your nickname?" Madam Yue said coldly as she grabbed onto her sword handle.

The old man Lu blushed, yet he didn't answer the question and only eyed Madam Yue angrily with his two yellow piercing eyes.

The old man was a master of the Hengshan School. However, he didn't have much fame in the Martial World. Linghu Chong had no clue about his identity, so he turned his head back and asked Lao Denuo.

"Who is he? What's his nick name?"

Linghu Chong knew that before Lao Denuo joined the Huashan School, he had Kung Fu skills already and also much knowledge about all kinds of anecdotes of the Martial World. Sure enough, Lao Denuo knew this one.

"This old folk's name is Lu Lianrong," Lao Denuo answered in whisper. "His formal nickname is 'Golden-eyed Eagle,' but because he is always gossipy and meddlesome, quite annoying all the time, so everybody called him 'Golden-eyed Crow', instead, behind his back."

Linghu Chong grinned. He thought, "Probably no one dared to call him that unpleasant nickname to his face, but as time went by, it would eventually come to his attention. When Master-Wife asked him about his nickname, he obviously knew that she was referring to 'Golden-eyed Crow' not 'Golden-eyed Eagle'."

Lu Lianrong snorted angrily. "'Gentleman Sword?' 'Hypocrite Sword' is probably more appropriate."

Witnessing such audacious behavior of humiliating the Master right to his face, Linghu Chong could no longer hold his anger. "You damn blind crow! Get your ass out here if you've got any guts!" he shouted out.

Yue Buqun had heard Linghu Chong talking with Lau Denuo outside and had been wondering, "How come Chong has come down the cliff?" Now hearing Linghu Chong's shouting, he reproved at once

"Chong, behave yourself. Uncle-Master is a guest here, how can you speak with such disrespect?"

Anger swept Lu Lianrong, and it seemed as if fire almost shot out of his piercing eyes. He had heard before how the Huashan School head apprentice Linghu Chong had run wild in Hengshan Town, so he yelled back.

"I was wondering who that might be. So it's the chap who went whoring in Hengshan Town! Huashan School surely houses a lot of talents."

"That's right! When I went whoring in Hengshan Town, I slept with a bitch named Lu!" Linghu Chong grinned.

"You...you, stop the nonsense!" Yue Buqun yelled at Linghu Chong angrily.

Seeing his Master getting angry, Linghu Chong dared not to say another word, while Lu Bai, Feng Buping, and the bunch simply couldn't help but grin.

Lu Lianrong turned around abruptly and kicked out with his left foot. With a loud bang, a frame of the long window was knocked flying in the air. He had never met Linghu Chong before, so he pointed at the general direction of the Huashan School apprentices and yelled.

"Which dirty swine said that?"

All the Huashan School apprentices stood silently and no one answered.

"God damn it! Which dirty swine just said that?" Lu Lianrong swore again.

"You were the only one talking. How would I know what kind of dirty swine you are?" Linghu Chong said with a big

grin.

Lu Lianrong's anger exploded. With a loud roar, he jumped onto Linghu Chong. Seeing the vicious force coming toward him, Linghu Chong leapt back. Suddenly, a shadow flashed as someone drifted out from inside the hall. Beams of silver light flashed while the sounds of weapon colliding echoed as the person started an all out attack on Lu Lianrong. It was Madam Yue. She leapt out of the hall, drew her sword, blocked Lu Lianrong's attack, and launched her counter-attack in such a smooth and uninterrupted manner. Her movements were simply beautiful and graceful. Even though she executed every single move in lightening fast speed, everyone was so taken by the beautiful movement that none noticed her swiftness.

"We are all friends here. Why don't we take our time and talk the issue through? There's no need to start a fight," Yue Buqun said as he strolled out of the hall without hurry.

Pulling out the sword by Lao Denuo's waist, Yue Buqun reached out and pushed his sword down after a flip, which held both Lu Lianrong's sword and Madam Yue's sword down under. Lu Lianrong shifted all his strength onto his arm and lifted with a hard jerk, but to his surprise, he couldn't move his sword even an inch. He blushed and then tried several times more, each time with a harder jerk.

"Our Five Mountains Sword Alliance has the same root with different branches. We are all like members of a big family. Apprentice brother Lu, please don't pay much attention to the junior kids." Yue Buqun smiled. He turned his head to Linghu Chong. "You are full of nonsense. Apologize to your Uncle-Master Lu right now," he admonished.

Getting the command from the Master, Linghu Chong had no other choice but to step forward and salute.

"Uncle-Master Lu, I was really blind and didn't know how to talk properly. I barked madly like a damn crow and slandered the reputation of a supreme Kung Fu master. This is so unworthy, even a dirty swine could have done better.

Will your Excellency please don't feel offended? I wasn't talking about you. The damn crow barks like mad, but we'll excuse him as if he was farting!"

He used the words "damn crow" back and forth. Everyone knew that he was ridiculing Lu Lianrong again. Most people were able to hold their laughs inside but Yue Lingshan started giggling loudly.

Yue Buqun could feel that Lu Lianrong tried to jerk upward three times in a row. He let out a slight smile and drew his sword back leisurely to give it back to Lao Denuo. When the tremendous pressure on Lu's sword suddenly vanished, Lu Lianrong's arm naturally went upward. Two cracking sounds echoed as two pieces of broken swords fell on the ground. Both Lu Lianrong's sword and Madam Yue's sword in their hands had only half of the blade remaining. Lu Lianrong had been using all his strength to fight Yue Buqun's push. When his arm went up abruptly, the broken sword in his hand also slashed upward and almost cut his own forehead. Fortunately he had great arm strength and was able to stop the movement in time, but the frantic rush still looked quite awkward.

"You...you...two against one!" Lu Lianrong snapped. But he soon remembered that Yue Buqun's inner energy broke Madam Yue's long sword just the same. By then Lu Bai, Feng Buping, and the rest bunch had all come out of the hall to watch the fight, and Lu Lianrong knew that each of them could easily tell Yue Buqun was only reconciling and preventing the two from fighting each other without granting favor to either side. However, it was probably no big deal for a husband to break a wife's long sword. Lu Lianrong, on the other hand, couldn't take it so easily, so he couldn't help but mutter:

"You...you...!"

Stamping his right foot on the floor heavily, he turned around and rushed away in rage with the broken sword still in his hand, never casting a glance back.

At the time when Yue Buqun had broken the two swords with his inner energy, he had already seen the Peach Valley's Six Fairies standing behind Linghu Chong. Very surprised by their unusual looks, he cupped his hands and greeted.

"The six of you have come to Mount Huashan and I haven't greeted you properly. Please pardon my ignorance."

The six Fairies simply stared at him blankly, neither greeting back, nor speaking a word.

"This is my Master, Head Master of the Huashan School – Mr. Yue...." Linghu Chong introduced.

Before he even finished his sentence, Feng Buping interrupted.

"Your Master, he sure is. Whether he is the Head Master of the Huashan School, we'll have to see. Apprentice brother Yue, the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' you just displayed is quite impressive. However, knowing this Qi-Gong technique does not make you competent for the authority over the Huashan School. Everyone knows that Huashan School is a sword school member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. Sword school, sword school! Of course, sword skill is the main driving force. But you keep working with your inner energy skills. You have gone on the evil route. What you are practicing is far from our school's orthodox principle."

"Brother Feng, your comments are really overstating," Yue Buqun defended. "Sure, each school of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance uses sword as the weapon, but no matter which school or which style it is, it all follows the principle of 'Energy Drives the Sword.' Sword skills are external techniques while Qi-Gong techniques are the internal techniques. One must master both the external and the internal to be able to achieve perfection in Kung Fu training. If someone only practices sword techniques like how you just described, then when he meets a Qi-Gong master, he would naturally be pale in comparison."

Feng Buping sneered. "That's not necessarily correct. It would be wonderful if someone can be an expert in every

field of the three religions and the nine schools of thought,<sup>3</sup> medicine, divination, astrology, fortune-telling, the Four Books and the Five Classics, and the eighteen types of weaponry.<sup>4</sup> It would be fantastic if he could be a master in every single style, let it be either knife art or spear art. But everyone's life span is limited and it is impossible for one to master everything. When one focuses only on sword art, it is already difficult to be excellent at it, why should he get sidetracked by other Kung Fu skills? I am not saying that practicing Qi-Gong techniques is bad, only that the orthodox Kung Fu of our Huashan School is sword art. It's totally fine if you want to get into the heterodox Kung Fu. Even if you decide to learn the 'Magical Art of Essence Absorbing' of the Demon Cult, it's your own choice and nobody else's business, let alone practicing Qi-Gong techniques. When an ordinary person ruins his own training because of greed and avarice, he has himself to blame for his suffering. Now since you are the Head Master of the Huashan School and have also chosen to go on such a destructive route, you are really misleading all the apprentices and exerting a widespread pernicious influence."

A notion suddenly popped into Linghu Chong's head. "Grand Uncle-Master Feng only taught me sword techniques. He...he is probably from the Sword-Branch. Is it...is it wrong that I have learned sword techniques from him?" Instantly, the thought sent cold shivers down his spine and he broke out a cold sweat.

"'Misleading all the apprentices and exerting a widespread pernicious influence?' That's not true." Yue Buqun smiled.

The short man standing next to Feng Buping suddenly cut in loudly. "Why is it not true? You have taught a bunch of damn useless apprentices. If that's not 'misleading all the apprentices and exerting a widespread pernicious influence,' then what is? Apprentice brother Feng said that your Kung Fu is the heterodox and you are not worthy to be the Head



Master of the Huashan School. He is absolutely right. Are you going to step down yourself, or wait for someone to drag you down?"

By then, Lu Dayou had finally arrived. Seeing that big apprentice brother stared at the short man with a questioning look, he whispered to Linghu Chong.

"I heard from their earlier conversations with Master that the short guy's name is Cheng Buyou."

"Brother Cheng," Yue Buqun said, "your Sword-Branch left our school twenty-five years ago and stopped calling yourselves apprentices of the Huashan School. Why do you come back and make trouble now? If you think your Kung Fu skills are wonderful, you can simply start your own school. Once you gain great fame in the Martial World and your reputation precedes the Huashan School, I would only have admiration. However, what good does your pointless argument do other than getting us on bad terms with each other?"

"Apprentice brother Yue," Cheng Buyou said loudly, "I have no grudge against you and really didn't want to get on bad terms with you. You arrogated the post of Huashan School Head Master, yet you only teach the apprentices inner energy techniques instead of advanced sword techniques. That caused our Huashan School's reputation to decline greatly. In the end, you can't just shirk the responsibility and shift the blame onto others. I am an apprentice of the Huashan School, that's why I can't just watch by the side with folded arms and pretend to not see it. In addition, when the Qi-Branch pushed the Sword-Branch out, your methods weren't that clear and aboveboard. None of our Sword-Branch apprentices were convinced of the legitimacy. We have already endured it for twenty-five years. Today is finally the time we can square the accounts."

"The conflict between the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch of our sword school has a long history. On that day when the two branches had the big contest atop the Jade

Maiden Peak, the winner was determined; what's right and what's wrong was identified. What good does it do for the three of you to bring the past history out twenty-five years later?" Yue Buqun said.

"Who saw the end result of the sword contest on that day? The three of us are all apprentices of the Sword-Branch, how come none of us saw it? In short, you took the Head Master post in a very unclear and suspicious fashion, otherwise, why would Alliance Chief Zuo, the leader of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, grant us the Command Flag to let you step down?" Cheng Buyou challenged.

"That is really odd!" Yue Buqun shook his head. "Alliance Chief Zuo has good understanding and judgment. Based on the scenario, he would have never granted the Command Flag all of a sudden to let the Huashan School change its Head Master."

"Are you saying the Command Flag is a fake?" Cheng Buyou pointed at the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance.

"The Command Flag is authentic, but the Command Flag doesn't speak," Yue Buqun said.

Lu Bai had been watching quietly by the side all the time. He finally cut in. "Apprentice brother Yue, you said that the Command Flag doesn't speak, but can't I speak either?"

"Even if Alliance Chief Zuo really thought so, his excellency still can't give the order after hearing only one side of the story. He's got to listen to my words as well.

Besides, Alliance Chief Zuo is the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and his responsibilities include the common issues across the five sword schools. Regarding internal affairs of the Taishan, Heng-Shan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools, the Head Master of each school has the authority," Yue Buqun concluded.

"You are surely wordy! So after all, you are not going to give up the post of the Head Master. Am I not right?" Cheng Buyou croaked.

By the time he spit out the words "Head Master," he had already drawn his sword. At the word "am," he shot out a thrust; at the word "I," he shot out another thrust; at the word "not," he shot out a third thrust; and at the word "right," he shot out one more thrust. He said the words "am I not right" in one breath, and he shot four thrusts out continuously at the same time.

The four thrusts were executed in supreme speed, and each of the four continuous thrusts used a different fierce technique with brilliant variation. The first thrust penetrated Yue Buqun's robe on his left shoulder, the second one penetrated his robe on his right shoulder, the third penetrated the sleeve by his left arm, and the fourth penetrated the robe by his right chest. Each of the four thrusts went straight through and all four of them left a total of eight holes on Yue Buqun's robe. The blade went right next to Yue Buqun's skin with a mere half-inch distance each time, though none touched his skin at all. The brilliance of the moves, the supreme speed, the precise accuracy, and the fierce force of the thrusts all showed the bearing of a first-class elite fighter.

All Huashan School apprentices turned pale with terror except Linghu Chong, thinking, "These four moves are all moves of our Huashan School style, but we have never seen Master demonstrate them before. The elite fighter from the Sword-Branch surely is extraordinary."

However, Lu Bai, Feng Buping, and the rest of the visitors felt more admiration toward Yue Buqun. When Cheng Buyou suddenly shot out four thrusts continuously, each thrust was a fierce move and capable of killing Yue Buqun on the spot, yet Yue Buqun still maintained his smile throughout the course and took the four thrusts with complete ease. The confidence he showed was exceptional. Cheng Buyou and his companions came to Mount Huashan with a clear intention to take the Head Master post from him. No matter how kind Yue Buqun was, he couldn't have not guarded against the

possibility that his opponent might launch a sudden attack to harm him, yet he didn't dodge at all and took the four thrusts without any worries. Obviously he had a plan well thought out, and as soon as Cheng Buyou proceeded to harm him, he would have a way to counter. Within the split of a second, he was actually capable of countering the enemy and protecting himself; his Kung Fu had to be far better than Cheng Buyou's. Yue Buqun didn't even move a little finger, but the power he had just shown was no different than winning the fight.

Linghu Chong recognized the four moves Cheng Buyou had used easily. They really originated from a Huashan School style sword move drawn on the rock wall in the back cave. Cheng Buyou simply transformed it into four different thrusts with slight variations. Although the four thrusts looked completely different from each other, they really all came from one move. He couldn't help but think, "No matter how brilliant Sword-Branch's sword moves are, they still can't exceed the scope of the drawings on the rock wall."

"Brother Cheng, my husband has given ground again and again, considering that you are all guests here. You have made eight holes on his robe already. If you haven't figured out how to behave yourself by now, be aware that even though our Huashan School respects its guests, there still is a limit," Madam Yue warned.

"Giving ground? Guests? What are you talking about? Madam Yue, all you have to do is to defeat my four sword moves. If you can do that, I'll leave the premise with no complaints. And not only that, I'll never set foot on the Jade Maiden Peak again," Cheng Buyou exclaimed.

Cheng Buyou considered himself an excellent swordsman, but seeing the confidence and calmness Yue Buqun just put on display, he dared not to challenge Yue Buqun. He thought, "Even though Madam Yue also has great fame in the Huashan School, she is a woman after all. Didn't she show a frightened look when she saw the four thrusts of

mine? If I can goad her into a fight, I am sure I can subdue her. By then, Yue Buqun might surrender for the sake of Madam Yue's safety. Or, at least, he would be greatly worried and get thrown off balance. That would certainly give brother Feng Buping some advantages.

"Madam Yue, please! It is well known that Heroine Ning is a first-class master of the Huashan School Qi-Branch. Cheng Buyou from the Sword-Branch would like to check out Heroine Ning's Qi-Gong techniques," cupping his hands, Cheng Buyou said loudly. By saying so, he had made it very clear that this was going to be a duel between the Sword-Branch and the Qi-Branch of the Huashan School.

Although Madam Yue wasn't sure she could beat those four clever and ingenious sword moves, she simply couldn't stand Cheng Buyou's overbearing attitude. With a loud ring, she unsheathed her sword.

"Master-Wife," Linghu Chong cut in quickly, "Sword-Branch's way of practice has gone astray. How could it ever match the orthodox Kung Fu of our Huashan School? Please allow me, the apprentice, to fight him first. If my Qi-Gong techniques are sloppy and I fail to beat him, then Master-Wife can dismiss him later."

He didn't even wait for Madam Yue's approval and leapt forward immediately, hiding Madam Yue behind his back. In his right hand, he held a broom, which he had picked up randomly by the wall.

"Master Cheng," Linghu Chong pointed the handle of the broom at Cheng Buyou, "you are no longer a member of our school. I guess I won't be calling you an Uncle-Master. If you have already realized your mistakes and want to mend your ways so you can join Huashan School again, I am not too sure whether my Master is still willing to take you back. Even if my Master is willing to make the sacrifice and take you back in, according to school rules - the earlier the more senior status - you will have to call me a senior apprentice brother. Come on, let's play!"

“Nonsense, you filthy swine! If you can survive these four moves of mine, I’ll submit myself to you as an apprentice,” Cheng Buyou shouted in outrage.

Linghu Chong shook his head. “I am not sure I want an apprentice like you....” Before he even finished the sentence, Cheng Buyou had interrupted him with a shout.

“Draw your sword and get ready to die!”

“Even a branch can be used as a sharp blade once it carries enough inner energy. Brother Cheng, just to counter those couple of your sloppy sword moves, I don’t think there’s a need to use a real sword,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Fine. Don’t blame me for being cruel then. Blame it on your own arrogance!”

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue both knew very well that Cheng’s Kung Fu skills were far superior to Linghu Chong’s. Using a broom against Cheng Buyou’s sword would be almost like fighting him with bare hands – way too dangerous. They shouted almost in unison.

“Chong, step back!”

In blazing flashes, Cheng Buyou lunged his thrusts toward Linghu Chong. It was the same move he had attacked Yue Buqun with a minute earlier. He had his reasons for using the exact same move. Firstly, those moves were among his best techniques. Secondly, he did say that he would use the same sword moves. Thirdly, by using the same moves again, he was letting his opponent gain certain advantages by knowing what to expect, thus getting compensated for his own advantage of using a better weapon.

Linghu Chong had already figured out ways to counter Cheng’s moves before he challenged Cheng Buyou. In those drawings on the rock wall in the back cave, all figures used unique weapons to counter sword moves. If he chose to use a sword in the fight, he wouldn’t have the certainty of success because he had not mastered the techniques in the Dugu Nine Swords. But the shabby broom had the shape of a

thunderbolt mace and would be perfect for those moves in the drawings.

Seeing Cheng Buyou's sword thrusting toward him, Linghu Chong brushed the broom toward Cheng Buyou's face. This brushing move was a very risky move indeed. A real thunderbolt mace is made out of steel, and if the brushing move had landed squarely, the opponent would have been either killed or at least severely wounded. If he had a real thunderbolt mace in his hand, the brushing move would be an ingenious move and the opponent would be forced to suspend his thrust and draw his sword back to defend. But what kind of damage would a shabby broom do to the opponent? He only had plain ordinary inner energy strength and was just talking big when he said "Even a branch can be used as a sharp blade once it carries enough inner energy." Even if the brushing move hit Cheng Buyou on the face, the most damage would be no more than a few scratches, nothing major at all, but Cheng Buyou's thrust would for sure penetrate his chest all the way. Linghu Chong was really betting on the theory that a senior master like Cheng Buyou would never allow the filthy and shabby broom to hit him in the face, because the humiliation would be too great compared to the satisfaction from killing Linghu Chong.

Surely enough, in the gasping sounds from the watching crowd, Cheng Buyou turned his head aside and pulled his sword back to chop at the broom. Linghu Chong moved the shabby broom to the side and dodged the chop.

Having no choice but to pull back his sword and block the broom in his first move, Cheng Buyou couldn't help but blush. He had no idea that Linghu Chong's brush with the shabby broom was actually created by over ten Demon Cult Elders working their hearts out, spending countless of hours with combined efforts just to counter this exact sword move of his. It was really a masterpiece work that had been polished again and again. He figured that Linghu Chong must have come up with such a move accidentally and

defeated his move by sheer luck. In great rage, he launched his second thrust. This time the thrust didn't follow the original sequence. It was really the fourth thrust he had used to pierce Yue Buqun's robe under Yue's armpit.

Linghu Chong turned his body to the side while handing over the broom to his left hand. It looked as if he was just dodging Cheng's thrust, but the shabby broom in his left hand suddenly shot out in a flash and went straight toward Cheng Buyou's chest. The broom was much longer than the sword, so even though the thrust from the broom was launched later, it reached the target earlier. Before Cheng Buyou had enough time to circle his blade around, the bamboo threads at the end of the broom had jabbed on to his chest.

"Got you!" Linghu Chong shouted.

With a quick slashing sound, Cheng Buyou's blade slashed the end of the broom off. But all the elite fighters in the watching crowd saw clearly that Cheng Buyou had already lost. If Linghu Chong had used a real thunderbolt mace, or a spike-toothed harrow, or a crescent shaped spade, all made out of steel, Cheng Buyou would have been badly injured in the chest.

If Linghu Chong were a first-class senior master, Cheng Buyou would have no choice but to throw down his sword to admit his defeat and give up the fight, but Linghu Chong obviously was just a second-generation apprentice, how embarrassing would it be to lose to him with his shabby broom? With that in mind, Cheng Buyou launched another three thrusts, all of which used superb techniques of the Huashan School. Out of the three moves, it turned out that two of them were among the ones carved on the rock wall in the back cave. Although Linghu Chong had never seen the third move, after learning the "Sword-Breaking Stance" in Dugu Nine Swords, he had a pretty good understanding of how to counter various sword moves out there. He turned his body and dodged one of Cheng's thrusts, then immediately



countered with a technique from the rock wall that used a staff to counter sword techniques. Using the broom handle as a staff, he knocked Cheng Buyou's sword to the side with a smack and then thrust his broom handle straight toward Cheng Buyou's sword tip. If he had had an iron staff or iron club in his hand, then because the staff was solid and the sword was flexible, when the two forces collided, the long sword would immediately break into pieces and the sword wielding fighter would have no way out of it. But when he used the technique in a hurry without too much thinking, he completely forgot that he was only holding a bamboo stick. When the bamboo stick met the sharp sword, it was almost like a hot knife cutting through butter, with a loud cracking sound, the long sword stabbed all the way into the bamboo stick leaving only the sword handle visible outside.

Linghu Chong reacted with a very quick mind within a split second. He struck the broom handle from the side with his right hand. The broom handle, together with the sword inside it, flew high in the air toward the side.

Filled with anger and embarrassment, Cheng Buyou flipped his left palm rapidly and with a loud smacking sound, struck Linghu Chong squarely on the chest. Cheng Buyou had decades of experience in Kung Fu, but Linghu Chong was only familiar with techniques in sword moves and was no match for him in a bare handed combat. Falling backwards, Linghu Chong flew in the air and landed on the floor with his back first while blood spurted out from his mouth.

Suddenly, several shadows flashed forward and in a split of a second, Cheng Buyou was already lifted off ground by his four limbs. A loud scream echoed as blood and internal organs shattered all over the floor – he had been ripped into four pieces. Four extremely ugly freaks each held in their hands one of Cheng Buyou's limbs. The four Peach Valley's Fairies had literally ripped a once alive Cheng Buyou into four pieces.

The sudden event happened so abruptly and unexpectedly that everyone in the crowd was struck dumb by terror. Seeing the horrible sight of blood and flesh mingling together, Yue Lingshan uttered a short shriek and then fainted. Even those very experienced elite fighters in the Martial World like Yue Buqun, Lu Bai, and so on were all seized with panic.

At the time when the four Peach Valley's Fairies ripped Cheng Buyou into pieces, Flower Fairy and Fruit Fairy had already rushed forward simultaneously. Picking Linghu Chong up from the floor, they ran toward the foothill in an amazing speed.

Yue Buqun and Feng Buping both drew their swords and thrust toward Branch Fairy and Leaf Fairy's backs almost at the same instant. Root Fairy and Trunk Fairy each took out a short iron club and blocked the two thrusts in unison. The weapon colliding sounds echoed as the four Peach Valley's Fairies accelerated away with their excellent Qing-Gong skills, never looking back.

Within seconds, the six freaks and Linghu Chong had all disappeared from sight. Lu Bai, Yue Buqun, and Feng Buping could only look at each other in blank dismay. Seeing how the six freaks had taken off in such amazing speed, they all knew too well that it was impossible to keep up with them. Staring at the blood and the four pieces that used to be Cheng Buyou, everyone felt great terror and shame. After a long while, Lu Bai shook his head. Feng Buping shook his head as well.

The palm strike from Cheng Buyou hit Linghu Chong solidly and squarely. Linghu Chong was so severely wounded that shortly after the two Peach Valley's Fairies carried him away, he fell unconscious. By the time he regained his consciousness and opened his eyes slowly, he saw two horsy faces, piled with concerns and caring, with two pairs of eyes staring directly at his face without blinking.

Seeing that Linghu Chong opened his eyes, Flower Fairy said in joy, "He's awake! He's awake! This lad won't die on us now."

"Of course he won't die on us. How could he die just because someone gave him a gentle palm strike?" Fruit Fairy commented.

"Geez, it all sounds so easy from your mouth. If this palm strike had landed on you, of course it would be nothing, but since it landed on this lad, maybe it will kill him," Flower Fairy snubbed.

"He is obviously not dead. Why are you saying that it will kill him?" Fruit Fairy asked.

"I didn't say that it definitely would kill him. I said that maybe it will kill him," Flower Fairy argued.

"Since he turned out to be alive, you can't say that 'maybe it will kill him'." Fruit Fairy disagreed.

"I've already said that. So what?" Flower Fairy charged.

"That proves that your foresight was totally wrong, and we can also say that you have no foresight," Fruit Fairy replied.

"If you had foresight and knew that for sure he wouldn't die, then why did you moan and groan and pull a long face?" Flower Fairy countered.

"First of all, I moaned and groaned earlier not because I worried that he might die. I was worrying about how worried the little nun would be once she sees him like this. Secondly, since we won the bet with the little nun and agreed to come to Mount Huashan and invite Linghu Chong to go see her, and now we've only gotten a half alive half dead Linghu Chong, I am afraid that the little nun wouldn't concur," Fruit Fairy explained.

"If you are so sure that he definitely won't die, you can just go tell the little nun to not worry about it. And since the little nun won't be worrying about it, why are you so worried?" Flower Fairy challenged.

“First of all, when I tell the little nun to not worry, she won’t necessarily listen to me. Even if she does listen to me and pretends to not worry, she will in fact still worry about it. Secondly, although this lad won’t die, he is indeed wounded pretty badly, and maybe it would be pretty hard to recover, then of course I am slightly worried,” Fruit Fairy answered.

Linghu Chong could hear the arguing back and forth between the two brothers. Their words were ludicrous, but obviously the two of them were both deeply concerned about his well being. He couldn’t help but feel grateful. When he heard the two talking about “the little nun might worry about him,” he figured that “the little nun” must have been little apprentice sister Yilin of the Heng-Shan School. So he said with a smile,

“You two can relax. Linghu Chong won’t die so easily.”

Fruit Fairy was overjoyed. “Did you hear that? He said himself that he won’t die. And you were saying that maybe it will kill him,” he said to Flower Fairy.

“When I said that earlier, he hadn’t opened his mouth and started talking yet,” Flower Fairy argued.

“He opened his eyes, then of course he would open his mouth and start talking next. Anybody can see that. Duh!” Fruit Fairy said.

Linghu Chong thought that if these two kept arguing back and forth, there would never be an end to it, so he interrupted with a smile, “I was going to die, but when I heard that the two of you really didn’t want me to die, I thought to myself, ‘Geez, Peach Valley’s Six Fairies have such immense fame and reputation in the...in the...\*cough\*... Martial World. When you don’t want me to die, how dare I die on you?’”

These words sounded like music in Flower Fairy and Fruit Fairy’s ears. They immediately agreed in unison, “Yes, yes! This guy’s words are so logical! Let’s go tell the other brothers.” The two of them rushed out in a dash.

Linghu Chong found himself lying on a wooden bed. The netting above his head was ragged and aged. Having no idea where he was at this moment, he turned his head slightly, which only resulted in great pains coming from his chest, so he remained still in the same position. Not long after, Root Fairy and the remaining Fairies all rushed into the room. As soon as they came in, they all started talking non-stop. Some of them started claiming credits for themselves; some appraised Linghu Chong's decision to not die on them; some others started talking about how they rushed into rescuing Linghu Chong and didn't have any time to square the account with that old dog from the Songshan School, otherwise, they would have ripped him into four pieces and see if he could still nip Peach Valley's Six Fairies dead like nipping puny ants after he turned into four pieces. In order to join in and share the happy mood the six Fairies were displaying, Linghu Chong struggled to gather enough strength and carried out a few dialogues, but he soon fell back into a coma.

In the wooziness, Linghu Chong felt nauseated in his chest, and almost felt like that his entire artery system had turned upside down. It was such an unspeakable discomfort. Then after a long while, he gradually regained his consciousness. This time he felt as if his body had been roasted in a huge oven. In great pain, he couldn't help but groan. Then he heard somebody yelling at him.

"Be quiet!"

Linghu Chong opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a tiny light from the lamp on the table. Then he found himself lying on the floor, almost completely naked. Four Peach Valley Fairies each grabbed hold of one of his four limbs, and the other two Fairies each had a palm on him, one pressed down on his stomach, the other one pressed down on the Bai-Hui Acupoint near his forehead. In great terror, Linghu Chong felt a stream of hot energy flowing upwards starting from the hollow of his left foot, passing by his left

leg, lower stomach, chest, right arm, all the way up to the hollow of his right palm. Then another stream of hot energy flew downward starting from the hollow of his left palm, passing by his left arm, chest, abdomen, right leg, all the way down till the hollow of his right foot. The two streams of hot energy twirled and circled as if they were hot steams heating up Linghu Chong. Sweat streamed down all over Linghu Chong's body. He couldn't stand the burning heat a second longer.

Linghu Chong knew the Peach Valley's Six Fairies were trying to heal his wounds using advanced Qi-Gong techniques with superb inner energy. While feeling grateful full heartedly, he tried to gather his own inner energy using the Huashan School style Qi-Gong techniques his Master had taught him, so that it would add to the streams of energy flow, but as soon as a stream of his own inner energy emerged from within his abdomen, an appalling pain suddenly came from his abdomen as if a knife had just cut through his stomach. Linghu Chong growled in pain as blood spurted out from his mouth like a fountain.

"Not good!" Peach Valley's Six Fairies cried out in unison!

Leaf Fairy flipped his palm in a hurry and struck Linghu Chong on the forehead, which knocked Linghu Chong out cold immediately.

Linghu Chong stayed in a coma afterwards, feeling hot for a moment and then cold for the next. The two streams of hot energy kept flowing back and forth around his entire body, and sometimes even more steams of hot energy would emerge and collide with each other, making it even more unbearable for him.

After an unknown amount of time, he finally felt a brief period of coolness in his head and gained some consciousness. He could hear that the Peach Valley's Six Fairies were in the middle of a heated argument. He opened his eyes slowly and saw Trunk Fairy standing next to him.

“See, he stopped sweating, and even opened his eyes. Isn’t my method the truly effective one? My stream of energy flows from Zhong-Du Acupoint to Feng-Shi Acupoint and Huan-Tiao Acupoint, and then circling back and forth around his Yuan-Ye Acupoint. I am positive that it will definitely heal his internal injuries,” Trunk Fairy claimed.

“Save your breath. If I hadn’t used my own method the day before yesterday and sent my stream of energy going back and forth along the many passages around his Foot-To-Liver Jue-Yin Channel<sup>5</sup>, the lad would have been dead a long time ago. Would you still have the chance to send your energy stream circling back and forth around his Yuan Ye Acupoint?” Root Fairy rebuffed.

“That’s right! But even though big brother’s method might heal his internal injuries, he would still not be able to walk using both of his feet. Wouldn’t that be a blemish in an otherwise perfect solution? I think my method is still the best. This lad’s internal wounds are really related to passage blockage to his pericardium. We got to use our inner energy to clear the blockage in the three visceral cavities in his Kidney Channel,” Branch Fairy concluded.

“What kind of nonsense is that? How would you know that his internal wounds are related to passage blockage to his pericardium? Did you get into his body and checked yourself?” Root Fairy rebuked angrily.

The arguing went on and on among the three brothers.

Leaf Fairy suddenly spoke out. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to let the energy stream circling back and forth around his Yuan-Ye Acupoint. It would be better to work on his Foot-To-Kidney Shao-Yin Channel first.”

Before anyone had a chance to comment, he had already grabbed onto the Yin-Gu Acupoint on Linghu Chong’s left knee. A stream of hot energy seeped inside Linghu Chong’s body through the acupoint.

Trunk Fairy was infuriated. “Hey! Are you making trouble for me again? Let’s each give it a try then, and see who’s

really right.”

After the words, he immediately worked harder on gathering more inner energy and filled them directly into Linghu Chong’s body.

Linghu Chong almost vomited and felt like that blood would spurt out of his mouth again any second. He groaned hard inwardly, “This is terrible! This is so terrible! The six of them really have good intentions and want to save my life, but they simply can’t agree with each other and each one decides to work on me in his unique way. I must have real lousy luck this time!”

He wanted to speak out and call on the six Fairies to stop right away but he didn’t even have the strength to move his tongue.

“He took the palm strike on the chest, which resulted in several internal injuries, then of course it would be logical to start healing from his Hand-To-Lung Tai-Yang Channel. The best solution will be to fill my energy stream into his Zhong-Fu, Chi-Ze, Kong-Zui, Lie-Que, Tai-Yuan, and Shao-Shang Acupoints.” Root Fairy started talking again.

“Big brother,” Trunk Fairy said, “I admire you in many different things. But you have to admit that I am much better than you in healing with inner energy. This lad is running a fever all over his body, and that’s the symptom of having too much positive energy in his body. We must start from his Hand Tai-Yang Channel. I’ve decided to open up his Shang-Yang, He-Gu, Shou-San-Li, Qu-Chi, and Ying-Xiang acupoints.”

“Wrong! Wrong! Totally wrong!” Branch Fairy said as he shook his head hard.

“What do you know? Why are you saying that I am totally wrong?” Branch Fairy rebuffed angrily.

Root Fairy, on the other hand, became quite happy. He said with a smile, “Third brother is the one who understand medical principles after all. He knows that I got it right, and second brother got it wrong.”



“Well, second brother sure got it wrong, but big brother, you didn’t get it right, either,” Leaf Fairy commented. “Look at him. This lad is showing a blank stare. His lips are trembling, yet he just doesn’t want to talk....”

(Linghu Chong scolded inwardly, “Who said that I don’t want to talk? After you guys sent your energy streams into a wild goose chase inside my body, how could I still have any strength left to talk?”)

Leaf Fairy continued, “...then of course his mind isn’t working right and he is turning into a retard. We must work on his Yang-Ming Stomach Channel.”

(Linghu Chong scolded inwardly again, “Your mind isn’t working right! You are the real retard here!”)

Right after Leaf Fairy’s words, Linghu Chong felt pain coming from his Si-Bai Acupoint right below the eye sockets, and then sourness came from his Di-Cang Acupoint by the corner of his mouth. Immediately after, severe pain came from the Da-Ying Acupoint, Jia-Che Acupoint on his face and many other acupoints like Tou-Wei Acupoint and Xia-Guang Acupoint on top of his head. And in the next moment, great sourness and itchiness followed. His facial muscles ended up going into spasms.

“You’ve worked on him for so long, yet he still can’t talk,” Fruit Fairy spoke. “I think his brain is just fine. Maybe his tongue is real stiff. That would be the symptom of a bad cold. Let me heal him with my inner energy by working on his Yin-Bai, Tai-Bai, Gong-Sun, Shang-Qiu, Di-Ji, and those types of acupoints. But...but...if it doesn’t work, you’d better not blame me for it.”

“If your method doesn’t work, you’d get him killed for sure, then how could he not blame you for it?” Trunk Fairy replied.

“But if you already know that his tongue is getting stiff, and still not work on his Foot-To-Spleen Tai-Yin Channel, are you just going to watch him die?” Fruit Fairy argued.

“But if your method is wrong, it’s gonna be pretty bad!” Branch Fairy suggested.

“Wrong method would be pretty bad, but not able to heal him is just as bad,” Flower Fairy cut in. “We’ve already worked on him for so long and he is still not getting any better. I am pretty sure he is having heart problems. We’ve got to work on his Hand-To-Heart Shao-Yang Channel first. It is obvious that the key lies in Shao-Hai, Tong-Li, Shen-Men, and Shao-Chong, those four acupoints.”

“Didn’t you say that we should work on his Foot-To-Kidney Shao-Yin Channel yesterday? How come you are talking about Hand-To-Heart Shao-Yang Channel today? Shao-Yang is all about gathering positive energy, and Shao-Yin is all about generating negative energy. Yin and Yang are totally opposite of each other; have you made up your mind about which one is the right one?” Fruit Fairy challenged.

“Well, positive energy, Yang, only exists because negative energy, Yin, exists. They are the two sides of the same thing, representing that one divides into two. Tai Chi<sup>6</sup> generates two bearings, and the two bearings merge again to make Tai Chi. Therefore, sometimes one divides into two and sometimes two merge to make one. Shao-Yang and Shao-Yin are both part of the pair. It’s not wise to just lump everything together.”

Linghu Chong couldn’t help but groan inwardly, “You might think it’s fine to make up lame excuses and nonsense, but how about my life? It’s no trifling matter!”

“We’ve tried this and that, but none seems to work. I’ve made up my mind. The only solution is to act willfully,” Root Fairy announced.

“How are you going to act willfully?” Trunk Fairy, Branch Fairy, and the rest of the Fairies asked in unison.

“This is apparently a very unique illness. Since it is a unique illness, we’ll have to start from unique acupuncture acupoints that are outside of the various channels. I am going to seal his Yin-Tang, Jin-Lv, Yu-Ye, Yu-Yao, Bai-Lao, and

Twelve-Jing Acupoints using distance acupoint-sealing technique,” Root Fairy explained.

“Big brother, don’t do that. It’s too risky,” the five Fairies shouted all together.

“Why not? If I don’t do it now, this lad would be dead in no time,” Root Fairy shouted loudly.

Linghu Chong felt as if numerous blades had cut through his Yin-Tang, Jin-Lv, and the rest of the acupoints, one after another with unbearable pain. Soon the pain became so severe that he couldn’t even tell from which acupuncture point the pain came from. He tried to howl with his mouth wide open, yet not a single sound came out. Right at that moment, a stream of hot energy forced its way into his acupoints in the Foot-To-Spleen Tai-Yin Channel and started to flow inside him like a wild tide. Soon, another stream of hot energy emerged through the acupoints in the Hand-To-Heart Shao-Yang Channel. The two streams of energy clashed and splattered each other wildly. Not long after, three more streams of hot energy forced their way in from different acupoints in different channels.

Linghu Chong’s heart was filled with anger and frustration, and his body, in the meantime, experienced unprecedented and unbearable pain and suffering. In the last couple of days when Peach Valley’s Six Fairies meddled with healing him on a wild goose chase, he had been in a coma and had no idea about it. But at the current moment, he was conscious, yet had no means to stop the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies from running wild. He could feel the six streams of hot energy forcing their way through his body at random, and his liver, gallbladder, kidney, lung, heart, spleen, stomach, intestine, bladder, pericardium, the three visceral cavities, and all other vital organs had become playgrounds and battlefield for the six brothers’ energy streams. Linghu Chong was furious. He yelled out loud inwardly,

“If I am lucky enough to survive this time, I’ll chop you six pigs into ten thousand pieces.”

Deep inside his heart, he knew that Peach Valley's Six Fairies all had good intents, and trying to heal him using inner energy would exhaust a good amount of their own inner energy. They would only have done this to friends with exceptional relationship. But at the very moment, he felt almost as if he was boiled, fried, and roasted alive. The suffering was so severe and so unbearable that if he had been able to speak, he would have spilled out the most venomous curses possible in human language.

Even while each of the six Fairies worked on healing Linghu Chong's internal wound using his own method, they never stopped arguing against each other. They had no idea that they had really made a huge mess with the passages and channels in Linghu Chong's body and made it a lot worse. Linghu Chong had been practicing Huashan School's high-grade Qi-Gong techniques since he was young. Even though his achievement of inner energy wasn't at a high level, because it was a kind of orthodox inner energy practice, he had a very solid foundation. And fortunately because of the solid foundation, he was able to linger on in a steadily worsening condition and didn't simply give it all up at the very beginning through the many days of healing, or should it be called torturing, from the six Fairies' meddling around.

Peach Valley's Six Fairies worked with their energy streams for a long while, but they could all tell that Linghu Chong's heart beat had become weaker and weaker and his breathing took longer and longer. It seemed that he could stop breathing and pass away any second now. They couldn't help but feel worried.

"I don't want to do this anymore. If I keep going and get him killed, he's gonna turn into a ghost in limbo that will keep haunting me and scaring the hell out of me!" Fruit Fairy announced as he pulled his palm away from Linghu Chong's acupoint.

Root Fairy yelled angrily, "If this lad kicks the bucket, he'll definitely blame you first. And once he turned into a ghost stuck in limbo, he'll always haunt you and only you."

In terror, Fruit Fairy let out a scream and jumped out of the window.

Trunk Fairy, Branch Fairy, and the rest Fairies pulled their hands back one after another. Some knitted their eyebrows together and wrinkled their noses while others shook their heads back and forth – none had any idea of what to do next.

"Looks like this lad is not going to make it. What do we do?" Leaf Fairy asked.

"Why don't you guys go tell the little nun that he couldn't stand the palm strike from that short dude and decided to die? We have ripped that short dude into four pieces and avenged his death already," Trunk Fairy suggested.

"Should we tell her about how we tried to heal him with our energy streams?" Root Fairy asked.

"No, no, no, no. Never. You can't mention that!" Trunk Fairy replied in a hurry.

"But what if the little nun then asks why we didn't try to heal him? What then?" Root Fairy asked again.

"Then we'll have to say that we tried to heal him but couldn't heal him," Trunk Fairy answered.

"Then wouldn't the little nun blame us and call Peach Valley's Six Fairies six good for nothing and useless skunks?" Root Fairy rebuffed.

"What? The little nun called us six skunks? How rude!" Trunk Fairy yelled out in rage.

"The little nun didn't say that. I did." Root Fairy corrected him.

"Then how would you know that she'd call us that?" Trunk Fairy rebuked angrily.

"Maybe she will!" Root Fairy said.

"And maybe she won't. What kind of rubbish is that?" Trunk Fairy wasn't too happy.

"Once this lad is dead, the little nun is going to get so mad. More likely than not she will call us something like that," Root Fairy insisted.

"I bet that the little nun will break into a loud and bitter cry, but she won't call us bad names," Trunk Fairy predicted.

"I'd rather have her call us six skunks than watching her cry out loud," Root Fairy disputed.

"She may not call us six skunks but something else." Trunk Fairy argued.

"Then what else?" Root Fairy asked.

"Do we six brothers look like skunks? I don't think it's even close. She might as well call us six pussy cats," Trunk Fairy explained.

"Why? Do we look like pussy cats?" Leaf Fairy cut in.

"When you call people names, they don't have to look like it," Flower Fairy joined the battle. "We six brothers are six guys. If the little nun called us six guys, was she calling us bad names?"

"But if she called us six stupid guys or bad guys, then she would be calling us bad names," Branch Fairy dismissed the theory.

"That still sounds better than six skunks," Flower Fairy disagreed.

"What if the six skunks are smart skunks, competent skunks, brave skunks, heroic skunks, and the Six Great Skunks in the Martial World? Would six guys sound better or would six skunks sound better?" Branch Fairy questioned.

Lying in bed and in his last gasp, Linghu Chong couldn't help but feel greatly amused at the endless debate. Somehow, a stream of energy traveled upward and provided him a burst of brief strength to actually speak out,

"Even six skunks are much better than you guys!"

The five Fairies were all astounded. Before any of them had a chance to think the words through Fruit Fairy had already asked from outside of the window.

"Why would six skunks be better than us?"

"Right, why would six skunks be better than us?" the five Fairies inside asked in unison.

Linghu Chong really wanted to spill out endless abuses and curses wholeheartedly, but he simply did not have any strength left to do it.

"You...you'd better send me...send me back to Mount Huashan. Only...only my Master can save...save my life...," he squeezed the words out disjointedly.

"What? Only your Master can save your life? Are you saying that Peach Valley's Six Fairies are incapable of saving your life?" Root Fairy asked in disbelief.

Linghu Chong struggled to signal a nod, and that used up the last bit of strength in his body. He opened his mouth but could no longer make any sound.

"That is just outrageous! What's so special about your Master? How can he possibly be any better than us, Peach Valley's Six Fairies?" Leaf Fairy mocked angrily.

"Humph! Ask his Master to have a fight with us!" Flower Fairy followed.

"We'll grab onto his two arms and two legs. Wham! We rip him into four pieces." Trunk Fairy added.

Fruit Fairy jumped back in through the window. "Even all the boys and girls on Mount Huashan. We'll rip each of them into four pieces, one after another," he suggested.

"Even all the dogs and cats and pigs and goats and chicken and ducks and tortoises and fish and shrimps. We'll grab onto their four limbs and rip them all into four pieces," Flower Fairy added.

"Do fish and shrimps have limbs? How are you going to grab onto their four limbs?" Branch Fairy questioned.

"Err...just grab onto the head and the tail and then the top fin and the bottom fin," Flower Fairy answered after a brief pause.

"But fish head is not a limb of the fish," Branch Fairy pressed on.

“So it’s not a limb. It doesn’t matter,” Flower Fairy replied.

“Of course it matters a great deal. Since it’s not a limb, that means your first sentence is completely wrong,” Branch Fairy concluded.

Flower Fairy knew very well that Branch Fairy had gotten a handle here, but he still tried to defend himself by sophistry. “What do you mean by my first sentence is completely wrong?”

“You said, ‘Even all the dogs and cats and pigs and goats and chicken and ducks and tortoises and fish and shrimps. We’ll grab onto their four limbs and rip them all into four pieces.’ Didn’t you say that?” Branch Fairy said.

“Sure, I said that. But that sentence isn’t the first sentence I said. I’ve already spoken hundreds and thousands of sentences, why did you say that this was my first sentence? If we start counting from the day I was born, I could have already spoken many millions of sentences. That certainly wasn’t the first sentence I spoke,” Flower Fairy argued.

Branch Fairy was stumped by the answer and found himself completely tongue-tied, having no clue about how to argue that.

“Did you say tortoises?” Trunk Fairy asked.

“That’s right. A tortoise has front legs and back legs, so of course it has four limbs,” Flower Fairy said.

“But when we grab onto the tortoise’s front legs and back legs and pull in four directions, how are we going to rip it into four pieces?” Trunk Fairy questioned.

“Why can’t we? What kind of Kung Fu does a tortoise have that can counter our four brothers’ mighty rip?” Flower Fairy didn’t get it.

“It’s very easy to rip the tortoise’s body into four pieces. But what about it’s hard shell? How can you rip the shell into four pieces by pulling the tortoise’s four legs? If you are not



going to rip the hard shell into pieces, then we'll end up with five pieces, not four," Trunk Fairy explained.

"Tortoise shells don't go by piece. You can't say a piece of shell, can you? You just said five pieces and that's wrong," Flower Fairy argued.

"There are a total of thirteen blocks on a tortoise shell. So four is wrong and five is also wrong," Branch Fairy clarified.

"I said rip into five pieces. I didn't say there are five blocks on a tortoise shell. You are obviously confused," Branch Fairy snubbed.

Root Fairy picked it up this time. "You are only ripping the body of the tortoise into four pieces and leaving the tortoise's hard shell alone. So you can only say 'Rip it into four pieces plus a hard shell that can't be ripped apart.' That's why what you just said, 'Rip it into five pieces,' is faulty wording. And it's not only faulty wording, but also completely wrong."

"Big brother, you just said it wrong! Faulty wording is not completely wrong, and completely wrong can't be faulty wording. These two are totally different. How can you mix them all up and confuse one with the other?" Leaf Fairy commented.

Hearing those six rattling on and on, Linghu Chong would have burst into loud laughter if he weren't on the verge between life and death. Those guys' words and acts were extremely funny and laughable, yet he only became more and more annoyed. Then he thought better of it.

"What are the odds of bumping into six such unique and matchless freaks? Such a chance has got to be hard to come by. This must be a trick from the Mighty Creator, maybe one of his rare jokes. To have the chance to be present personally on such a grand occasion is really something. I guess my life has its worth already. I really should make a toast for that."

At that thought, his unrestrained spirit took over. "Give me...give me some wine!" he shouted.

Hearing these words, Peach Valley's Six Fairies immediately found themselves in much merrier spirits. "Excellent! Excellent! He wants to drink wine, then he's not gonna die," they all said.

"Doesn't matter if...if I am gonna die...die or not. I've got to...got to drink my fill first," Linghu Chong muttered in between groans.

"Sure, sure! I'll go get some wine," Branch Fairy replied, and soon he brought back a big kettle of wine.

Linghu Chong's spirit immediately shot up when he smelled the wonderful scent of wine. "Feed me," he requested.

Branch Fairy plugged the kettle spout into Linghu Chong's mouth and slowly poured the wine into it. A moment later, Linghu Chong finished the entire kettle of wine to the last drop, and his mind also started to work better.

"My Master...always said that among all...all the great heroes...in the world, the toughest had to be Peach...Peach...Peach...."

"Among all the great heroes in the world, the toughest had to be the Peach what?" Peach Valley's Six Fairies asked in unison, all feeling totally anxious as if someone was tickling their hearts with a feather.

"Had to be...to be Peach...Peach...Peach...."

"Peach Valley's Six Fairies!" the six Fairies said in unison.

"That's right," Linghu Chong confirmed. "My Master also said that he really wished to have the chance of drinking together with Peach Valley's Six Fairies and make friends with them, then he would ask those six...six great...great...."

"Six great heroes!" Peach Valley's Six Fairies said in unison.

"Yeah," Linghu Chong confirmed again. "Then he would ask those six great heroes to give all the apprentices a demonstration and perform...perform their unique and superb Kung Fu skills...."

Peach Valley's Six Fairies all started talking immediately afterwards.

"Then what next?"

"How does your Master know that we have superb Kung Fu skills?"

"The Head Master of the Huashan School is really a very nice guy! We've got to make sure that we don't even break a branch on Mount Huashan."

"That's of course! We won't even let anyone else break a branch on Mount Huashan."

"We'll be very glad to make friends with your Master. Let's go up Mount Huashan right now!"

Linghu Chong quickly picked up the line. "Right! Let's go up Mount Huashan right now!"

Wasting no time, Peach Valley's Six Fairies carried Linghu Chong and immediately headed toward Mount Huashan. After walking for quite a while, Root Fairy suddenly cried out.

"Wait a minute! The little nun wanted us to bring the lad to see her. Why are we taking him to Mount Huashan? If we don't bring the lad to see the little nun, wouldn't we have just...just...ah...won another bet? Two wins in a row! That will be quite embarrassing."

"Big brother said it right this time. Let's first bring him to see the little nun. We will go up Mount Huashan afterwards so we won't be winning it one more time," Trunk Fairy agreed.

The six of them turned around and started heading south.

"Does the little nun want to see a living person or a dead one?" Linghu Chong asked, feeling very worried.

"Of course she wants to see a living lad, not a dead lad," Root Fairy answered.

"If you don't send me up Mount Huashan, I will shut down my arteries immediately and never come back to life again," Linghu Chong threatened.

"That's great! It must be a very advanced technique to be able to shut down your arteries. Please tell us the details,"

Fruit Fairy said happily.

“As soon as you master this technique, you drop dead instantly. What good does it do to learn that technique?” Trunk Fairy rebuffed.

“It is still useful. If you were forced...forced by others to do things and your life have become a living hell, and all there left are unbearable worries, then it makes perfect sense to shut down your own arteries,” Linghu Chong claimed while panting hard.

Peach Valley’s Six Fairies’ faces fell at those words. “The little nun just wants to see you. She has no ill intention. We aren’t forcing you either.”

“I know the six of you have very good intents,” Linghu Chong said with a sigh, “but if I can’t tell my Master and get his permission first, I won’t comply even if that means I’ll have to give up my life. Besides, my Master and Master-Wife had long wished to meet the six...six...legendary...great...great...great....”

“Great heroes!” Peach Valley’s Six Fairies said in unison.

Linghu Chong nodded his confirmation.

“Fine! We’ll send you back to Mount Huashan then,” Root Fairy finally agreed.

Several hours later, the group of seven was back on Mount Huashan once again.

As soon as the apprentices of Huashan School spotted the group of seven, they dashed back and reported it to Yue Buqun. Hearing that the six freaks that kidnapped Linghu Chong had just returned, the Yue couple immediately greeted out with a bunch of apprentices, feeling completely astounded.

Peach Valley’s Six Fairies all traveled at great speed, so as soon as the Yue Couple stepped out of the “House of Integrity” they could already see the six freaks walking toward them along the stone slab road. Two of the six freaks carried a stretcher with Linghu Chong lying still on it.

Madam Yue rushed forward hurriedly to check on Linghu Chong. What immediately caught her eyes were his two sunken cheeks and a sallow face. She reached out to check his pulse, but what she found only confirmed the worst. Linghu Chong's pulse was so weak and out of order. He was barely alive.

"Chong, Chong!" Madam Yue cried in shock.

"Master...Master...Master-Wife!" Linghu Chong murmured after he slowly opened his eyes.

"Chong, I'll seek revenge for you!" Tear filled Madam's eyes as she drew her sword, ready to stab Flower Fairy, who was one of the two carrying the stretcher.

"Wait!" Yue Buqun shouted. He cupped his hands and saluted the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. "Please pardon me for having not greeted the six of you with proper manners. Will you bestow me the honor by informing me your names and which school you're from?"

Hearing those words, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies were stunned with a mixed feeling of anger and disappointment. When they heard Linghu Chong's words, they had thought that Yue Buqun had truly admired them, the six brothers. Who would have expected that the first sentence out of Yue Buqun's mouth was actually asking for their names? Obviously Yue knew absolutely nothing about the Peach Valley's Six Fairies.

"We heard that you truly admired us six brothers. Could that be a false statement? But how can you be so ignorant of us? What a shame!" Root Fairy said.

"Didn't you say that among all the great heroes the toughest had to be Peach Valley's Six Fairies? Aha, I got it! The name Peach Valley's Six Fairies must have long resounded in your ears, but you simply have no clue that we are the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. Guess we can't blame you," Trunk Fairies followed.

"Second brother, he said that he really wished to have a drink with Peach Valley's Six Fairies and make friends with

them, but once the six of us really showed up on Mount Huashan, he looked neither wildly happy nor willing to get us some wine. So it turned out that he does know the Six Fairies' great fame but doesn't know the Six Fairies' faces. Ha-ha! That is so hilarious," Branch Fairy picked up the line.

Yue Buqun was completely baffled by those words. Not able to make any sense out of them, he simply replied coldly, "You call yourselves the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. I am only an ordinary person. How dare I make friends with six Fairies?"

Peach Valley's Six Fairies instantly felt great joy.

"That would be no problem! We are friends of your apprentice, so we might as well make friends with you," Branch Fairy declared.

"Even though your Kung Fu skills are too ordinary, we won't be looking down upon you. You don't have to worry," Fruit Fairy comforted him.

"If you have any questions in your Kung Fu study, you can feel free to ask us. Of course we'll give you some pointers," Flower Fairy promised.

"Oh, many thanks for that!" Yue Buqun said with a slight smile.

"You don't need to thank us. Now that we, Peach Valley's Six Fairies, consider you a friend, then of course we'll say everything we know with no reserve," Trunk Fairy replied.

"Why don't I demonstrate some cool techniques to everyone of the Huashan School and widen your horizons?" Fruit Fairy suggested.

Madam Yue had no idea that the six brothers were really a bunch of childish and artless guys who lacked common senses. What they said were actually meant for showing their sincere kindness. But these words sounded so offensive and insulting in Madam Yue's ears. She could no longer hold her anger. Raising her arm evenly with her shoulder, she pointed the sword tip right at Fruit Fairy's Solar Plexus.

"Great! Let me get my lesson first and check out your special Kung Fu in weaponry," Madam Yue rebuked.

“The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies rarely use weapons when we spar with people. Didn’t you say that you truly admired our Kung Fu skills? How come you didn’t know that part?” Fruit Fairy said with a grin.

In Madam Yue’s ears, Fruit Fairy’s words sounded even more insulting. “I didn’t know that part!” she yelled as she suddenly made a lunge with her long sword. The thrust was so rapid and sudden, carrying a tremendous force with it.

Fruit Fairy had already thought of Madam Yue as a friend and never expected her to start such a fierce attack all of a sudden. Within a split of a second, the sword tip had already reached his chest. If he had wanted to defend himself, he would still have had enough time to do so with his superb Kung Fu skills, but since he was such a cowardly type, he was simply struck dumb and completely forgot to dodge, only watching in terror as the sword penetrated his body.

Branch Fairy leapt forward hurriedly and struck Madam Yue in the shoulder with his palm. Madam Yue let go of her sword and stumbled a couple of steps back, leaving the long sword stabbed into Fairy’s chest, wobbling up and down.

Root Fairy and the rest Fairies all gasped in terror. Branch Fairy picked up Fruit Fairy and leapt back in a hurry while the rest four Fairies rushed forward and lifted Madam Yue by her four limbs in incredible speed. Yue Buqun knew too well what was going to happen next – the four freaks would tear at the same time and rip Madam Yue’s body into four pieces. Even though he was pretty good at staying calm, his wrist still trembled as he sent out two thrusts toward Root Fairy and Leaf Fairy separately with his long sword.

Lying on the stretcher, Linghu Chong could still see the dangerous state his Master-Wife was in. In great despair, he struggled up and shouted.

“Don’t hurt my Master-Wife! Or I will shut down all my arteries!”

Before his voice even faded, blood had squirmed out from his mouth. Linghu Chong fell back down unconscious.

“That lad is gonna shut down his arteries. We can’t let that happen! Let go of the bitch!” Root Fairy yelled out as he dodged the thrust from Yue Buqun.

The four Fairies dropped Madam Yue on the ground. Greatly worried about Fruit Fairy’s fatal injury, they ran after Branch Fairy and Fruit Fairy quickly.

Yue Buqun and Yue Lingshan rushed over to Madam Yue’s side at the same time. Before they even had a chance to reach out and prop Madam Yue up, she had already leapt back onto her own feet. Feeling a mixture of extreme terror and rage, she couldn’t help but tremble. Her face looked completely pale and sallow.

“Junior apprentice sister, don’t be angry. We’ll seek our revenge for sure. Those six guys are very tough enemies. Fortunately you have already killed one of them,” Yue Buqun whispered.

Madam Yue’s heart hammered even more as she remembered the scene several days earlier when Cheng Buyou was ripped apart alive. “I...I...I...,” she murmured yet could no longer speak normally because her entire body was still shaking hard.

“Lingshan, why don’t you take your mother back in to have a rest,” Yue Buqun said to his daughter, knowing that his wife had been completely horrified.

Yue Buqun walked by Linghu Chong to check on him. There was blood all over Linghu Chong’s face and chest. His breathing was so weak that it almost seemed there was more air breathed out of him than what was breathed in – he was not going to make it. Yue Buqun placed his palm on top of Linghu Chong’s Ling-Tai Acupoint on the back in an attempt to use his own high-level inner energy to keep Linghu Chong alive, but as soon as he tried to fill his inner energy in through the acupoint, several streams of weird inner energy inside Linghu Chong’s body immediately countered it with a big shock and almost shook his palm off. Completely astounded, he soon discovered that those lunatic energy



streams were clashing against each other nonstop inside Linghu Chong's body as well. He put his palm next to Tan-Zhong Acupoint on Linghu Chong's chest, and sure enough, a strong shock struck his palm so hard that even his own chest started hurting with a dull pain. Yue Buqun was astonished even more this time. He could tell that those energy streams inside Linghu Chong's body flew in odd ways. Apparently they came from some type of advanced yet unorthodox Qi-Gong techniques. Even though each energy stream by itself was slightly weaker than his "Divine Art of Violet Twilight," as soon as two of them attack in the same direction or at the time, he could no longer hold them off on his own. After some more careful detection, he counted a total of six energy streams inside Linghu Chong, and each of them was weird and bizarre. Afraid to continue, Yue Buqun pulled his palm back and pondered.

"There are a total of six energy streams, then of course it had to be those six freaks who filled those into Chong's body. The six freaks are so vicious. They must have tortured Chong so badly by filling their own inner energy into six different channels inside Chong's body, so Chong would suffer constantly, and wouldn't even have the option to end his own misery by committing suicide."

Yue Buqun knitted his brows heavily and shook his head. After telling Gao Gengming and Lu Dayou to carry Linghu Chong inside he went to check on his wife.

Madam Yue was still in shock. While sitting on the bedside holding her daughter's hands, she looked terrified, her face as white as a sheet. As soon as she saw Yue Buqun, she asked,

"How's Chong doing? How serious is his injury?"

Yue Buqun explained how the six energy streams clashed and fought each other inside Linghu Chong's body.

"We've got to dissolve those six heterodox energy streams one by one. Do you think there's still time?" Madam Yue asked.

Yue Buqun raised his head and pondered. After a long while, he finally spoke again.

"Junior apprentice sister, what's your opinion on why the six freaks tortured Chong so badly?"

"I guess they wanted Chong to give in and surrender. Or maybe they were trying to force out some kind of secret of our school from him. Chong of course would rather die than submit. That's why the six ugly freaks tortured him," Madam Yue suggested.

"That would be a logical explanation in ordinary situations," Yue Buqun nodded. "But our school doesn't have any secret. Those six freaks don't know us at all and have no grudges against us. Why would they send him back after successfully kidnapping him in the first place?"

"I am afraid...Nah, it couldn't be." Madam Yue thought of an idea but immediately dismissed it because it did not really make a lot of sense.

The couple stared at each other in silence, each pondering hard with knitted brows.

"Although our school doesn't have any secret, Huashan style Kung Fu has a great reputation. Maybe those six freaks kidnapped big apprentice brother so they could force him to tell the key elements of our school's Qi-Gong techniques and sword art techniques." Yue Lingshan couldn't help but cut in.

"I've thought about this," Yue Buqun said, "but Chong's inner energy isn't that advanced. Those six freaks have very advanced inner energy themselves, so they could easily tell. And regarding sword skills, the six freaks' Kung Fu style is far from Huashan style sword art. They don't have anything in common. It makes no sense for them to go through so much trouble just for that. Besides, if they did want to compel Chong into telling them about sword techniques, they should have gone to somewhere far from Mount Huashan so they could torture and force Chong with no rush. Why did they bring him back here?"

From Yue Buqun's tone of voice, Madam Yue could tell that he was getting more and more affirmative. Having been his wife for so many years, she knew that her husband had already solved the mystery. So she asked, "Then what's really the reason behind?"

"Use Chong's internal injury to exhaust my inner energy," Yue Buqun said slowly, his face looking solemn and serious.

Madam Yue jumped onto her feet. "That's right! In order to save Chong's life, you've got to use your own inner energy to dissolve those six energy streams. By the time you are about to succeed, if those six ugly freaks suddenly came, while you would be totally exhausted, they would be at their ease, then they could easily kill all of us."

She paused for a brief moment and then continued. "Fortunately there are only five freaks left. Senior apprentice brother, they had already taken me a prisoner earlier. Why did they let me go after Chong shouted at them?" She felt the terror again as she remembered the horrible incident she had just experienced moments earlier. Her voice trembled again.

"That's exactly the cause for my conclusion." Yue Buqun explained. "You killed one of them. They must have had extraordinary hatred for us. But they immediately set you free only because they were afraid that Chong would shut down his own arteries and commit suicide. Think about it. If they didn't have a big conspiracy, why would they value Chong's life so much?"

"Their wickedness and ruthlessness are to the extreme!" Madam Yue murmured as she thought to herself, "When the four freaks ripped Cheng Buyou into pieces, they showed tremendous cruelty. Such level of cruelty is rarely seen in the entire Martial World. In the last several days, my heart has been hammering every time I thought about it. Their interruption did put a pause on Feng Buping's plan to take over the Head Master post. Feng Buping ended up leaving

disappointed with Lu Bai and the bunch. Those six freaks definitely took care of the problem for the Huashan School temporarily. Who would have thought that they would come back to Mount Huashan to cause more trouble? It must have been just like what senior apprentice brother has figured out."

At that thought, Madam Yue said, "You can't work on Chong with your inner energy. My inner energy mastery is far less than yours, but let's hope it's good enough to keep him alive temporarily." She started to head toward the door.

"Junior apprentice sister!" Yue Buqun called out.

Madam Yue paused and turned her head back.

"It's no use. Those six freaks' heterodox energy streams are very powerful." Yue Buqun shook his head.

"So only your 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' is capable of dissolving them, isn't it? What should we do then?" Madam Yue asked.

"Right now we can only take one step at a time and see where it will lead us. Let's first keep him breathing. That doesn't require much of my inner energy anyway," Yue Buqun suggested.

The three went into the room Linghu Chong was placed in. Madam Yue's tears started rolling again as soon as she saw Linghu Chong lying there motionless, hardly breathing at all. She reached out to check on Linghu Chong's pulse, but Yue Buqun caught her hand with his own. He let her hand go after shaking his head slightly. Pressing both hands onto Linghu Chong's palms, Yue Buqun slowly passed his inner energy over. As soon as his inner energy clashed with the energy streams inside Linghu Chong, Yue Buqun's body shook abruptly and he took a step back, his face turning violet.

Linghu Chong suddenly started talking. "Where...where is apprentice brother Lin?"

"Why do you need Little Lin?" Yue Lingshan asked in surprise.

"Before his father...passed away, he wanted me to take a message...to apprentice brother Lin. I haven't had a chance to tell him.... I am not going to make it this time. Find...find him, hurry." Linghu Chong murmured, his eyes still shut tight.

Tear started rolling in Yue Lingshan's eyes. She covered her face and ran out of the room. All the Huashan School apprentices had been waiting outside. Getting the message from Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi went inside right away and walked by Linghu Chong's bed.

"Big apprentice brother, you need to take care!" Lin Pingzhi said.

"Is...is this apprentice brother Lin?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Yes, it's me," Lin Pingzhi answered.

"Right...right before your father...passed away, I was by...by his side. He wanted me to...to tell...you..." Linghu Chong's voice became weaker and weaker as if he had ran out of breath. Everyone held his or her breaths. The room was swept with dead silence.

After quite a while Linghu Chong finally caught his breath. He continued, "He said that you should take good care of the thing in the old Lin House at the Xiang-Yang Alley in Fuzhou. But...but you shall never read...read it, or...or great misfortune will fall upon you...!"

"The old Lin House at the Xiang-Yang Alley? That has been left vacant for a good while. There is nothing of importance there. What is this thing that my father told me to not read?" Lin Pingzhi asked in surprise.

"I don't know. Those are all the words...all the words... your parents wanted me to tell you. They didn't say anything else...before they...passed...passed away...." Linghu Chong's voice went weaker again.

The four of them waited a few more moments, but Linghu Chong remained silent. Yue Buqun heaved a sigh and then said to Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan,

“Wait here by your big apprentice brother’s side. If his injury has any change, come and tell me right away.”

Lin and Yue both nodded.

The Yue couple went back to their own room, both feeling very depressed. Only moments later, tears slowly streamed down Madam Yue’s cheeks once again.

“Don’t be upset. We’ll definitely avenge Chong,” Yue Buqun assured her.

“Since those six freaks plotted this venomous scheme, they will come back again for sure. If we fight them recklessly, we might not necessarily lose, but if anything goes wrong....” Madam Yue said.

“‘We might not necessarily lose?’ That’s far easier said than done. If we fight three of them together, we would end up a draw at most. If we fight four of them together, then most likely we will lose. If the five of them all jump onto us simultaneously....” Yue Buqun shook his head slowly.

Madam Yue knew herself that the two of them would be no match for the five freaks in a fight, but she had hoped that since her husband’s Kung Fu had greatly improved in the last several years after he successfully mastered the “Divine Art of Violet Twilight,” there might still be a small chance of winning. When she heard Yue Buqun’s words, she became greatly worried.

“Then...then what do we do? Are we going to just fold our arms and await destruction?”

“Don’t get dispirited. A true man can handle both good times and bad times. Winning or losing doesn’t have to be determined right away. It is never too late for revenge, even if we have to wait for ten years,” Yue Buqun suggested.

“Are you suggesting that we run away?” Madam Yue asked.

“We are not running away. We are only avoiding them temporarily. Right now the enemies outnumber us. We only have two, how could we beat the five of them all together? Since you have already killed one of the freaks, we have

really gotten the upper hand of it already. Avoiding them temporarily will do no harm to our Huashan School's reputation. Besides, as long as we keep this to ourselves, outsiders would never know anything about it," Yue Buqun explained.

Madam Yue said with a sob, "Even though I killed one of the freaks, Chong could die any minute now. We really only... only got even in this conflict. Chong...Chong...." She paused for a second and then said, "Alright, let's use your idea. We'll bring Chong together with us and then try to heal his injury gradually."

Yue Buqun heaved a sigh but didn't answer.

"Do you mean that we can't bring Chong with us?" Madam Yue asked anxiously.

"Chong's injury is very severe. If we bring him with us and travel at double the speed, he won't even last for an hour," Yue Buqun replied.

"Then...then what? Isn't there anything we can do to save him?" Madam Yue asked in despair.

"Alas, I was determined to teach him the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' the other day. Who would have expected that he went off into wild flights of imagination and tumbled into the evil route of the Sword-Branch? If he had begun studying the secret formula, even just a page or two of it, he would have been able to manage his own inner energy for self-healing and not worry about the six heterodox energy streams." Yue Buqun heaved a sigh.

"This matter brooks no delay. Why don't you go teach him the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' right away? Maybe he won't be able to understand all of it in his current sick state, but it would still be better than not learning it at all. Or, you can leave the 'Violet Twilight Manuscript' with him so he can study on his own following the book." Madam Yue jumped onto her feet.

Yue Buqun held Madam Yue's hands into his own and said softly, "Junior apprentice sister, my love for Chong is no less

than yours. But think about it. He has been so severely injured. How could he pay attention to me when I teach him the formulas and the various techniques? If I leave the 'Violet Twilight Manuscript' with him so he could study from the book by himself when his mind becomes clearer, then when those five freaks come back to Mount Huashan in no time, since Chong would not be capable of defending himself, what's going to happen to this most valued Qi-Gong manuscript of our Huashan School? Those five freaks would get their hands onto it for sure. And if those heterodox people get hold of the supreme orthodox Qi-Gong manuscript of our Huashan School, and was able to use it to help them harm the society a great deal more, I, Yue Buqun, would stand condemned through the ages."

Thinking that her husband's words were quite reasonable, Madam Yue couldn't help but shed more tears.

"Those five freaks don't do things in the ordinary order. No one can predict what they might do next. We don't have any time to waste. Let's get on the road right away," Yue Buqun said.

"Are we just going to leave Chong here and let those five freaks torture him more? I'll stay to guard him," Madam Yue proposed.

As soon as the words came out of her mouth, she immediately realized that it was just an act on impulse of an ordinary housewife, not something that would suit her status as the "Heroine of the Huashan School." If she stayed, it would only result in sacrificing one more life for nothing. How could she protect Linghu Chong at all? Besides, if she had decided to stay, then how would her husband and daughter ever agree to leave Mount Huashan without her? Feeling great worries and sorrows, her tears poured down nonstop.

Yue Buqun shook his head and let out a long sigh. He moved aside his pillow and took out a thin iron box. After removing the lid, he took out a brocade-covered booklet. Putting the booklet inside his chest pocket, he pushed the



door open and walked out. To his surprise, he found Yue Lingshan standing outside the door.

"Daddy, I am afraid that big apprentice brother...is not going to pull through," Yue Lingshan said.

"What happened?" Yue Buqun asked in shock.

"He keeps raving about things and it seems that he is in a state of delirium," Yue Lingshan replied.

"What did he rave about?" Yue Buqun asked.

"I don't understand what he raved about," Yue Lingshan answered with a blush.

It turned out that under the torment from those six energy streams in his body, and seeing Yue Lingshan standing right in front of him, in his wooziness, Linghu Chong blurted out without thinking,

"Little apprentice sister, I...I really miss you! Have you fallen in love with apprentice brother Lin and decided to ignore me now?"

Even in her wildest imagination, Yue Lingshan had never expected that Linghu Chong would ask such a question right in front of Lin Pingzhi. She blushed big time, feeling ultimately embarrassed. Then she heard Linghu Chong murmuring again.

"Little apprentice sister, we grew up together since we were kids. We played together and practiced sword art together. I...I really don't know how and where I displeased you. If you are mad at me, you can punch me. You can swear at me. Even if...even if you stab me with your sword I won't have any complaints. But please don't be so cold to me and totally ignore me...."

Linghu Chong had been thinking about those words again and again inwardly over the last couple of months. If he were to be conscious, he would not have dared to speak them out even if he was with Yue Lingshan alone. But since he had no self-constraint at the moment, he really spilled his heart out.

"I'll just be outside," Lin Pingzhi said in embarrassment.

"No, no! You stay here and watch over big apprentice brother," Yue Lingshan uttered and then rushed out of the door.

She ran straight toward her parents' room, but when she arrived at the door, she heard the using "Divine Art of Violet Twilight" to heal the injury discussion between her parents, so she waited at the door, daring not to interrupt.

"Go send out my order to everyone. I want everybody to come to the 'House of Integrity'," Yue Buqun said to Yue Lingshan.

"Yes, but what about big apprentice brother? Who's going to care for him?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"Tell Dayou to look after him," Yue Buqun answered.

Yue Lingshan took the order and then went on her way to inform everyone. Soon, all of Huashan School apprentices had gathered in the "House of Integrity" and lined up based on school seniority. Yue Buqun sat down in the armchair in the middle. Madam Yue sat in a chair next to him.

After casting a quick glance at the crowd and confirming that all except Linghu Chong and Lu Dayou had arrived. Yue Buqun started addressing all the apprentices.

"Among last generation senior masters of our sword school, some of them strayed into the wrong road. They kept perfecting sword techniques but ignored the practice of inner energy with Qi-Gong techniques. They hardly realized that all advanced martial arts require Qi-Gong techniques to build a solid foundation. If one can't master Qi-Gong techniques, then regardless of how well he has mastered his sword techniques, he would never be able to reach the acme of martial arts. But unfortunately, those last generation senior masters obstinately stuck to a wrong course. They went on their own way to create a new branch called Huashan Sword-Branch and called our orthodox Kung Fu Huashan Qi-Branch. The dispute between the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch went on for many decades, which greatly obstructed the

development and growth of our Huashan School. What a great calamity it is." He paused and heaved a deep sigh.

Madam Yue thought inwardly, "Those five freaks could show up any moment, and you are still here telling old stories with leisure." She cast a side-glance to her husband but dared not to interrupt. Throwing a peek at the inscribed board where it said "House of Integrity," she thought to herself, "At the time when I first joined Huashan School to learn sword art, the words inscribed on the board were really 'Force of Sword Towering the Clouds.' But now it has been changed to 'House of Integrity.' No one even remembers where the old board might be. Alas, I was only a thirteen-year-old little girl at the time. Now...now...."

Yue Buqun continued. "But what's righteous and what's evil, what's right and what's wrong, the truth would eventually shine at the end. Twenty-five years ago, the Sword-Branch took a crushing defeat and withdrew from our Huashan School. I have been the Head Master of the Huashan School ever since. Several days ago, a group of expelled apprentices of our school, Feng Buping, Cheng Buyou, and some others, came back to Mount Huashan. I am not sure how they did it, but they succeeded in convincing the Alliance Chief of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, Chief Zuo, by cheats and lies, and came to seize the Head Master post of our Huashan School with Alliance Chief Zuo's Command Flag. I have been holding the post of Head Master in our school for many years. There are plenty of tedious internal tasks associated with the job, not mentioning all the things to deal with when the five sword schools meet. I've long thought about relinquishing my post in favor of somebody more qualified, so I could dedicate myself to the task of studying advanced Qi-Gong techniques of our school. I should really be only too glad to hear that somebody is willing to take over with the duties." At that word, he paused again.

“Master, Feng Buping and the other Sword-Branch expelled apprentices have all gone on the evil route. They are really no different from members of the Demon Cult. We should never even let them come back to join our Huashan School, how can we ever let them take the Head Master post of our school with their wishful thinking?” Gao Gengming commented.

“We’ll never let their audacious plot succeed!” Lao Denuo, Liang Fa, Shi Daizi, and the rest of the apprentices exclaimed all together.

Seeing that all the apprentices’ feeling ran high, Yue Buqun let out a slight smile. “It’s really not important whether I am the Head Master or not. But if the heterodox people from the Sword-Branch ruled our school, all the hundreds of years worth of Huashan School’s vast comprehensive and profound Kung Fu techniques would all be destroyed in a moment. When we one day return to the underworld, how would we ever face the spirits of many generations of Huashan School senior masters? And the reputation of our Huashan School would be held in contempt by everyone in the Martial World.”

“That’s right! How can we ever let that happen?” Lao Denuo and the bunch of apprentices said in unison.

“I wouldn’t worry too much about Feng Buping and the rest of the Sword-Branch expelled apprentices,” Yue Buqun went on. “But since they were able to bring the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance and also able to collaborate with people from Songshan, Taishan, and Hengshan those schools, this is no small matter. That’s why....” He swept his eyes over the apprentices and then spoke again. “We’ll be leaving today to see Alliance Chief Zuo at Mount Songshan, and have it out with him.”

All the apprentices were shocked. The Songshan Sword School was the leader in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and the Head Master of the Songshan School, Zuo Lengchan, was considered a top notch in the Martial World. Not only had

his Kung Fu skills reached the acme of perfection, his reputation as a quick-witted and resourceful mind was also well known. Anytime when the name "Alliance Chief Zuo" was mentioned, everyone would get a shiver of cold. In the Martial World, when one had it out with someone else, the dispute normally wouldn't stop at an oral discussion. Any heated word might lead to a fierce physical fight. All the apprentices couldn't help but thinking the same thought.

"Master's Kung Fu is excellent, but he most likely is still no match for Alliance Chief Zuo. Besides, the Songshan School's Alliance Chief Zuo has twelve apprentice brothers. People in the Martial World call them the 'Thirteen Guardians of Songshan.' Even though 'Great Songyang Palm' Fei Bin has passed away, there are still a total of twelve of them left. And each of the twelve is a first-class elite fighter – someone a second-generation Huashan apprentice would have no chance of resisting. Isn't it a bit too reckless to stir up trouble on Mount Songshan?"

Every one of the apprentices thought so, yet no one dared to speak up.

Hearing what her husband had just said, Madam Yue immediately praised inwardly. "This idea is awesome! We are leaving our base, Mount Huashan, so we could avoid the five Peach Valley's freaks. Once the news spreads out, Huashan School would have no face left. But if we were heading up Mount Songshan to have it out with Alliance Chief Zuo, others would only admire our courage. Alliance Chief Zuo is not the unreasonable type. Once we get to Mount Songshan, it's not necessary that we'll end up in a deadly fight. There's gonna be a lot of rooms and cushions in between." So she immediately picked up the line.

"That's right! Feng Buping did bring the Command Flag of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance up Mount Huashan. But who knows, he could very possibly have stolen or robbed the Command Flag from someone else. Even if it's true that Alliance Chief Zuo did award them the Command Flag of the

Five Mountains Sword Alliance, this is the internal matter of our Huashan School. The Songshan School has no say in this at all. Sure, Songshan School has a lot more members, and Alliance Chief Zuo has superb Kung Fu skills, but we, Huashan School members, would rather die than submit. Any one of you who has no guts and is afraid might as well stay."

None of the apprentices wanted to look like a coward, so they all answered, "We will follow Master and Master-Wife's orders and never hesitate to go through fire and water for Master and Master-Wife."

"Perfect! The matter brooks no delay. Go pack your stuff. We'll get on the road in one hour." Madam Yue commanded.

Before starting the trip, Madam Yue went to check on Linghu Chong again. Seeing Linghu Chong's lifeless face, she felt great pain and grievance deep in her heart. But the five Peach Valley's freaks could come back in any moment. She simply couldn't risk having Mount Huashan completely wiped out just for Linghu Chong's sake. So she had Lu Dayou move Linghu Chong into the little hut at the back.

"Dayou," she said, "we are going to Mount Songshan to have it out with Alliance Chief Zuo for the sake of our Huashan School's future. This is going to be a very risky trip. We just hope that under the direction from your Master, we will be able to uphold justice and all come back safely. Chong's injury is very severe. You will take good care of him. If any enemy comes to attack, try your best to avoid conflict even if you have to endure humiliation. Don't get Chong and yourself killed for nothing."

Lu Dayou nodded his acknowledgement with tears in his eyes.

After Lu Dayou saw Master, Master-Wife, and all the apprentice brothers and sisters off Mount Huashan, he went back to the little hut where Linghu Chong was resting. By now, the entire Huashan School on Mount Huashan only had two residents - one was his big apprentice brother who was still in a coma, the other one was himself, completely alone

and on his own. He found himself in a state of anxiety. The deepening dusk only made him more afraid of the unforeseen future.

After making a pot of rice soup in the kitchen, he filled a bowl and propped Linghu Chong up to have some. Only at the third swallow, Linghu Chong coughed all the soup out. The white rice soup had turned red. Linghu Chong must have coughed all the blood in his stomach out together with it. While feeling terrified, Lu Dayou helped Linghu Chong lie down again. Setting the soup bowl down, he stared at the darkness outside of the window blankly and fell into a trance. He had no idea how long he had been in a daze when several owl hoots woke him.

"It is said that when an owl hoots, it is really counting a patient's eyebrows," he thought. "By the time the owl finishes counting, it would be the moment for the patient to die." So he put his finger into his mouth to gather some spit and then smeared it on Linghu Chong's eyebrows so the owl would have a real hard job counting them.

Suddenly sounds of footsteps came from the mountain path. Lu Dayou blew out the oil lamp hurriedly. His sword in his hand, he guarded by Linghu Chong's bedside. The sounds came closer and closer, and it seemed that someone was heading straight toward the little hut. Lu Dayou's heart almost jumped out of his chest. He thought to himself, "It seems that the enemy knows very well that big apprentice brother is resting over here. That's terrible! How can I protect big apprentice brother from any harm?"

Then he heard a girl's voice whispering into the room, "Monkey Six, are you inside?" It turned out to be the voice of Yue Lingshan.

"Is that little apprentice sister? I...I am in here," Lu Dayou answered with unspeakable joy. He lit the oil lamp again, but in the hurry and excitement, he splashed the oil all over his hands.

Yue Lingshan pushed the door open and walked in. "How's big apprentice brother?" she asked.

"He just coughed some more blood," Lu Dayou answered.

Yue Lingshan walked by the bedside and reached out to feel Linghu Chong's forehead. It was burning hot.

"How come he's coughing blood again?" she asked in a frown.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong spoke out. "Little...little apprentice sister, is it you?"

"Yes, big apprentice brother. How do you feel right now?" Yue Lingshan asked softly.

"I...I'm feeling...alright," Linghu Chong murmured.

Yue Lingshan took out a pack from her chest pocket.

"Big apprentice brother, this is 'Violet Twilight Manuscript.' Dad said that...."

"Violet Twilight Manuscript?" Linghu Chong uttered in surprise.

"That's right. Dad said that you are suffering from heterodox Kung Fu masters' energy streams and only our own school's most supreme inner energy techniques can dissolve them. Monkey Six, you read the manuscript word by word for big apprentice brother. But you must not study any of it yourself. Otherwise, if Dad finds out about it, humph, you know the consequences," Yue Lingshan exclaimed.

Lu Dayou was overjoyed. He answered hurriedly, "I am just a bum. How would I ever dare to secretly study the most supreme inner energy techniques of our school? You can rest assured. This is great! In order to save big apprentice brother's life, Master is even willing to make an exception and bestow the manuscript to him. Thank goodness, big apprentice brother can be saved now."

"You must not mention this to anyone. I stole the manuscript from underneath my dad's pillow," Yue Lingshan whispered.

"Whaaaat? Did you just say that you stole Master's... Master's manuscript of inner energy techniques? What if



Master finds it out?" Lu Dayou was shocked.

"So what? You think I am gonna get killed for doing this? Dad will probably give me a good beating and scolding at most. If big apprentice brother could survive because of it, Mom and Dad will surely be overjoyed and forgive me for what I did," Yue Lingshan answered.

"Right! Right! Saving life is the more urgent matter here," Lu Dayou said in agreement.

"Little apprentice sister, you bring it back to...to Master," Linghu Chong suddenly interrupted.

"Why?" Yue Lingshan asked in surprise. "It was no easy task to steal the manuscript, and I had to travel miles of mountain path in the dark to make it back. Why don't you want it? This is not a matter of studying Kung Fu on the sly; this is a matter of life and death."

"She's right! Big apprentice brother, you don't have to study everything out of it, just enough so you can dissolve those six freaks' evil energy streams. Then you can return the manuscript back to Master. By then, Master will probably bestow the manuscript to you officially. You are the head apprentice of our school, so of course you are the one who will get awarded this manuscript. Who else will ever have the opportunity? You are only getting it a bit earlier. What's the matter?" Lu Dayou couldn't agree more.

"I...I would rather die than disobey Master's will," Linghu Chong replied. "Master said it before that I can't...study the Divine Art of Violet Twilight. Little...little apprentice sister, little...little apprentice sister..." Not able to catch his breath, Linghu Chong fell unconscious again.

Yue Lingshan checked under his nose. The breathing was weak, but at least he was still breathing. After a sigh, she said to Lu Dayou, "I've got to head back. Mom and Dad are gonna be so worried if I don't make it back to the temple by dawn. Talk to big apprentice brother, will you? Ask him to do as I said and study the Violet Twilight Manuscript. Tell him to not forget that...." She blushed for a second and then

finished the sentence. "...I went through all the trouble of running about just for him."

"I will definitely talk to him," Lu Dayou replied. "Little apprentice sister, where are you lodging at?"

We lodged at White-Horse Temple tonight," Yue Lingshan answered.

"Oh, White-Horse Temple is like ten miles from here. Little apprentice sister, I am sure big apprentice brother will never forget the trouble you have gone through to make a twenty-mile round trip in one night."

"I only wish that he could survive and recover. That would be the best. What does it matter if he remembers this or not?" Yue Lingshan sobbed.

She gently set the Violet Twilight Manuscript booklet at the head of the bed. After staring at Linghu Chong's face for a moment, she ran out of the door.

Linghu Chong didn't wake up until over two hours later. Before he even opened his eyes, he had already cried out, "Little...apprentice sister, little apprentice sister!"

"She left already," Lu Dayou said.

"She left?" Linghu Chong cried out. All of a sudden, he sat up and grabbed onto Lu Dayou's collar band.

That gave Lu Dayou a good jolt. He explained hurriedly, "Yes, little apprentice sister has left. She said that if she couldn't make it back before dawn, Master and Master-Wife would get worried. Big apprentice brother, why don't you lie down to rest?"

"She...she left? She left with apprentice brother Lin?" Linghu Chong murmured as if he didn't catch any of Lu Dayou's words.

"She is together with Master and Master-Wife," Lu Dayou explained. But Linghu Chong only responded with a blank stare and a twitched face.

"Big apprentice brother," Lu Dayou said in a soft voice, "little apprentice sister cares about you very much. A young girl like her, running back from White-Horse Temple late at

night, making a round trip of twenty miles, she really has deep affections for you. Before she left, she urged me again and again. She wants you to study the Violet Twilight Manuscript and not to forget...forget her feelings for you."

"Did she say that?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Yeah! Would I dare lie to you?" Lu Dayou replied.

Linghu Chong could no longer hold himself steady. The back of his head banged heavily against the brick bed as he fell back down, but he didn't feel any pain at all.

That gave Lu Dayou another jolt.

"Big apprentice brother, let me read it for you," Lu Dayou said. He picked up the Violet Twilight Manuscript. Turning to the first page, he started reading.

"All forms of martial arts use inner energy as the base. The vast amount of righteous energy is bestowed upon us from Heaven. But ordinary people are ignorant of the right way to preserve the energy and let their emotions to stand in the way instead. The perils of a martial are violent, arrogant, cruel, and evil. Being violent causes disturbance to the spirit, thus disrupts the energy flow; being arrogant causes separation of spirit, thus makes the energy impetuous; being cruel causes the void of humanity, thus drains the energy source; being evil causes vicious behavior, thus shortens the energy breath. Those four perils are all like blades that would block and cut off energy flow...."

"What are you reading?" Linghu Chong asked.

"That was the first chapter of the Violet Twilight Manuscript," Lu Dayou answered. "And after those, it's like this..." he went on reading.

"Abstain the four perils and return to many types of delicate kindness. Restrain your violent and cruel emotion to preserve your righteous energy stream. Beat the Heaven Drum, drink the Jade Honey, rinse the Corona Pool, and tap the Golden Beam.<sup>7</sup> Follow the way and soon the effect will show."

"This is the secret formula of our school. By reading it recklessly, you have already violated our school rule. Put it away immediately," Linghu Chong admonished in a strict voice.

"Big apprentice brother, in urgent circumstances, a true man would do what is expedient, instead of rigidly adhere to details. Right now it's more important to save your life. Let me read to you some more," Lu Dayou said. He went on reading and the scripts started explaining the details of the advanced Qi-Gong techniques like how to "beat the Heaven Drum and drink the Jade Honey" and how to "rinse the Corona Pool and tap the Golden Beam."

"Shut up!" Linghu Chong yelled out loudly.

Lu Dayou was taken by shock. He raised his head and asked, "Big apprentice brother, are you...are you alright? Where does it hurt?"

"My entire body hurts when I hear...hear you read Master's...manuscript of inner energy techniques. Are you trying to make me a...disloyal and dishonorable man?" Linghu Chong roared angrily.

"No, no! How would that make you disloyal and dishonorable?" Lu Dayou was astounded.

"Master brought the Violet Twilight Manuscript up to the 'Cliff of Contemplation' the other day and wanted to teach me the techniques. But he found out that not only my way of practicing was way off, but also my natural endowment, so he changed his mind...mind...." Linghu Chong panted heavily and had a hard time to speak on.

"This time, it's for the sake of saving your life, not about studying the Kung Fu in sly, so...so it's a totally different matter," Lu Dayou argued.

"As apprentices, which is more important, our own lives or Master's orders?" Linghu Chong asked.

"The most important thing is that Master and Master-Wife both want you to stay alive, let alone...let alone little apprentice sister's affections for you. She had to make such a

long round trip late at night. How can you let her down?" Lu Dayou said.

Linghu Chong felt a sudden urge to cry but he worked hard to hold the tears back.

"Just because she...she brought it here for me...I...Linghu Chong am a man with pride. Why would I ever take pity from others?"

As soon as those words came out, his body shivered as he pondered upon himself, "I am never a stickler for regulations. In order to save myself, what's the big deal if I do study the inner energy techniques of our own school? So the real reason why I don't want to study the Divine Art of Violet Twilight is because I am mad at little apprentice sister. Deep in my heart, I resented the fact that little apprentice treats apprentice brother Lin with much affection and treats me coldly. Linghu Chong, look at you. When have you become so stingy?" But when he thought that by the time of dawn, Yue Lingshan would join Lin Pingzhi again on the long trip to Mount Songshan and they would travel side by side, chatting and singing folk songs together again, he could no longer hold on to his tears.

"Big apprentice brother, you've thought it wrong. Little apprentice sister grew up together with you. You...you are almost like brother and sister," Lu Dayou persuaded.

"That's exactly what I don't want to be: brother and sister," Linghu Chong thought, but he couldn't speak it out loud.

Lu Dayou continued. "I'll read on. You listen carefully. If you can't memorize it, I'll read it a couple of more times. All forms of martial arts use inner energy as the base. The vast amount of righteous energy is bestowed upon us from Heaven...."

"Stop it!" Linghu Chong yelled out in a stern voice.

"Sure, sure, big apprentice brother," Lu Dayou answered. "In hope for your speedy recovery, I have no other choice but to disobey your order. I'll take all the blames for breaking

Master's order. You don't want to listen, but I just wouldn't let you. It was I, Lu Dayou, who insisted on reading it. You never even touched the Violet Twilight Manuscript with a finger of yours. You never looked at a word in the manuscript either. What's your fault? You are laid up in bed and simply can't help it. It's I, Lu Dayou, who forced you to study it. All forms of martial arts use inner energy as the base. The vast amount of righteous energy is bestowed upon us from Heaven...." He just read on and on in a flow of eloquence.

Linghu Chong tried to ignore it, but words after words forced their way into his ears. He suddenly groaned loudly.

"Big apprentice brother, are you alright?" Lu Dayou asked hurriedly.

"Will you please pad...pad my pillow...pillow a bit higher?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Sure." Lu Dayou answered and reached forward to pad Linghu Chong's pillow.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong jabbed forward with all this strength, and his finger jabbed right onto the Tan-Zhong Acupoint on Lu Dayou's chest. Lu Dayou fell down onto the bed without even a groan.

"Sixth apprentice brother, I am sorry I have to do this. You can rest on bed for half a day and then your sealed acupoint...acupoint will open by itself." Linghu Chong said with a wry smile.

Linghu Chong slowly struggled his way off the bed. Throwing a stare at the Violet Twilight Manuscript booklet for a moment, he finally heaved a sigh and walked by the door. Picking up the door bolt leaning against the wall, he used it as a crutch and stumbled out the door.

Greatly worried, Lu Dayou called out, "Big...big...where...are you...going...?"

Normally when someone's Tan-Zhong Acupoint was sealed, he would not be able to talk at all, but because Linghu Chong was so weak, his jab only made Lu Dayou's arms and legs numb and failed to completely paralyze him.

Linghu Chong turned his head back. "Sixth apprentice brother, I want to stay as far away from the Violet Twilight Manuscript as possible. I don't want anyone to see my dead body next to the manuscript and think that I studied the supreme techniques on the sly and died from fire deviation...I don't want to be looked down on by apprentice brother Lin...." At that word, he coughed again. More blood gushed out of his mouth and dripped down by his chin.

Afraid that he might not be able to leave at all with his almost exhausted strength from any more delay, he took a deep breath and walked forward with the help from the door bolt. Relying on his strong will, he slowly made his way forward and ultimately disappeared in the dark.

# **Chapter 12: Assassins**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**The fifteen masked men slowly approached forward, their thirty eyes shined through the holes on their masks like the eyes of fierce wild animals, filled with cruelty and hostility.**

For every hundred feet, Linghu Chong had to take a break and lean on the door bolt to catch his breath. After about an hour of struggle, he managed to cover somewhat close to a quarter of a mile. He could see more and more golden flickers circle around him and suddenly the entire world swirled around him. He almost fell down. Then he heard loud groans coming from inside the bushes right in front of him.

“Who’s there?” Linghu Chong asked, stunned.

“Is that brother Linghu?” the man called out. “It’s me, Tian Boguang! Ouch! Whew!” He was obviously in great pain.

“Tian...brother Tian? What...happened to you?” Linghu Chong asked in shock.

“I am dying! Brother Linghu, do me a favor, will you? Ouch...ouch...go ahead and kill me to end my misery!” Tian Boguang begged. He groaned as he spoke, but his voice remained loud and clear.

“Are...you...you...wounded?” Linghu Chong asked. But in the meantime, his knees gave out. He fell down and rolled to the roadside.

“Are you wounded too?” Tian Boguang asked in shock. “Ouch! Ouch! Who did it to you?”

“That’s a long story. Tian...brother Tian, so who did that to you?”

“Alas, I don’t know!” Tian Boguang answered.

“How come?” Linghu Chong asked.

“I was just walking on the road, and suddenly someone grabbed my two legs and two arms and lifted me off the ground. I couldn’t even see who did it...,” Tian Boguang answered.

“So it’s the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies again.... Why, brother Tian, aren’t you in the same team?” Linghu Chong

grinned.

"What do you mean we are in the same team?" Tian Boguang was at a loss.

"You came to invite me to go see little apprentice sister... Yilin. They...they also came...to invite...me to go see...her...." Linghu Chong started panting.

Tian Boguang crawled slowly out of the bush.

"God damn it! We are definitely not in the same team," Tian Boguang swore as he shook his head angrily. "They came up Mount Huashan looking for a guy and asked me where the guy was. So I asked them who they were looking for. But they said that since they caught me, they get to ask me questions, and I don't get to ask them anything. If I had caught them, then I would get to ask them questions and they would not get to ask me anything. They...ouch...they said that if I've got skills, it would be totally fine for me to lift them up, and then...then it would be my turn to ask them questions."

Linghu Chong laughed out loud. But only after a few laughs he was already out of breath and had to stop.

"At that time, I was still hanging in mid-air facing down. How the heck could I lift them up even if I did have superb skills? What kind of horse dung was that?"

"So what happened next?" Linghu Chong asked.

"I said, 'I never wanted to ask you. You are the ones asking here. Put me down.' Then one of them said, 'Since we've already lifted you up, if we don't rip you into four pieces, wouldn't it look real bad for us six great heroes?' Another one asked, 'Will he still be able to talk after we rip him into four pieces?'" Tian Boguang paused to catch his breath.

"Those six guys always resort to sophistry and tangle things in a mess. Brother Tian, that's enough...enough of the story," Linghu Chong said.

"Humph! The hell with them!" Tian Boguang cursed and went on.

“Then one of them said, ‘Duh, of course a guy in four pieces can’t talk. The six of us have ripped hundreds of people into four pieces before. When did you ever hear any of them talk after we ripped them apart?’

“Another one argued, ‘The reason why a guy in four pieces doesn’t talk is because we never asked him to. If we were to ask him anything, I am sure he wouldn’t dare not to answer.’

“Then a third one mocked, ‘He is already in four pieces. What’s there to be afraid of? There’s no point for him to dare. Would he be afraid that we’d rip him into eight pieces?’

“The previous one said, ‘Rip him into eight pieces? That Kung Fu is no small matter. We used to know that Kung Fu, but we must have forgotten it already.’”

Tian Boguang told the story in a disjointed manner. It was amazing that he memorized every little bit of it while being inflicted with serious injuries.

“Those six brothers are surely the rare kind in this world. They...they got me pretty good too,” Linghu Chong said with a sigh.

“So brother Linghu, they wounded you too?” Tian Boguang asked in astonishment.

“Unfortunately so!” Linghu Chong heaved another sigh.

“To tell you the truth, when I was hanging in mid-air, I was really scared. So I shouted loudly, ‘If you rip me into four pieces, I won’t talk for sure. Even if my tongue is still capable of talking, I would be so pissed in my heart that I definitely wouldn’t talk.’

“One of them said, ‘Once we rip you into four pieces, your tongue is on one piece, and your heart is on another piece. How can you still relate what your tongue is gonna say with what you feel in your heart?’

“That was when I decided to throw nonsense right back at them. So I shouted, ‘If you want to ask your question, better ask it quick. If you don’t put me down right away, I am gonna let out my poisonous gas now.’

“One of them asked, ‘Let out your poisonous gas? What do you mean?’

“I said, ‘My farts stink like hell. Once it reaches you, you would not only lose your appetite for at least three days and three nights, you would also throw up so badly that even the stuff you ate three days ago would come back out of your mouth. I’ve warned you. Don’t blame me for not telling you ahead of time.’”

“Hey, good point,” Linghu Chong remarked with a weak smile.

“Yep,” Tian Boguang replied, “as soon as those four guys heard my words, they all cried out in unison and threw me back down to the ground before leaping back. I jumped back onto my feet and then saw six very odd-looking old folks, each covering his nose tightly with his hand, obviously afraid of my stinking farts. Brother Linghu, did you say that those six guys are called something like Peach Valley’s Six Fairies?”

“That’s right! Alas, too bad that I am not as smart as you, brother Tian, and didn’t think of the stinking-fart...stratagem to scare them off. This stratagem of yours is really no less than the...the empty-city stratagem Zhu Gelang used that scared away Sima Yi’s army.”<sup>8</sup>

Tian Boguang let out a few hollow laughs and spilled out some more curses before continuing on with his story.

“I knew that those six guys are not to be trifled with, but as luck would have it, I left my blade on top of your ‘Cliff of Contemplation.’ So I figured that I’d better make it the banana and split, but those six guys had already stood in front of me in a line with their hands still covering their noses, and blocked my way like a wall made of flesh. Ha-ha, none of them dared to stand behind my back though. Seeing that there was no way I could make my way through, I turned around immediately, but who would have thought that those six guys could move like ghosts and somehow had already circled around to block in front of me again. I turned a couple more times but still could not get rid of them, so I walked

backwards step after step until my back touched the precipice wall. The six freaks burst with joy and chortled as they asked again and again. 'Where is he? Where is that guy?'

"I asked, 'Who are you looking for?'

"Those six freaks said in unison, 'We have surrounded you. You've got nowhere to go. You must answer our question.'

"One of them said, 'If it were you who have surrounded us and we've got nowhere to go, then you could ask us and we would have to answer your question.'

"Another one argued, 'He is only by himself. How will he be able to surround the six of us?'

"The previous one said, 'What if he had superb skills and could beat the six of us all by himself?'

"The second one said, 'Then he is capable of beating us, not surrounding us.'

"The previous one said, 'But what if he drove us into a cave and blocked the entrance so none of us could get out? Wouldn't you call that surrounding?'

"The second one argued, 'That's called blocking, not surrounding.'

"The previous one said, 'Then what if he extends his arms and embraces all of us into his arms? Now that's definitely called surrounding.'

"The second one argued, 'First, nobody in this world has arms that long. Second, even if there are really people who have arms that long, this guy here does not. Third, even if he could embrace all of us with his arms, that's called embracing, not surrounding.'

"The previous one pulled a long face and didn't know how to argue that, yet he didn't want to admit his defeat. After a few moment of dazing, he suddenly broke into loud laughter. 'That's it! If he keeps farting and surrounds us with his stinky gas so we couldn't run away - wouldn't you call that surrounding?'

"The other four freaks applauded and agreed in laughter, 'He's right! This chap surely can surround us.'

"An idea suddenly struck me. Wasting no time, I started running at once while shouting, 'I...I am surrounding you now.'

"I figured, since they are so afraid of my farts, surely they wouldn't go after me, but who would have thought that those six freaks had lightning fast speed. Only after a few steps, they had already grabbed hold of me. As soon as they caught me, they pressed down hard with tight grips and forced me to sit on top of a big rock, so that even if I did fart, my stinking gas wouldn't come out."

Linghu Chong couldn't help but burst into loud laughter. Only after a few laughs, he felt great uneasiness from his chest and stopped laughing abruptly.

Tian Boguang went on.

"After those six freaks placed their tight grips on me, one of them asked, 'Where does one's gas come from?'

"Another one answered, 'Gas comes from one's intestines, then of course it belongs to the Yang-Ming Intestine Channel. I'd better seal his Shang-Yang, He-Gu, Qu-Chi, and Ying-Xiang those Acupoints.'

"Right after those words, he had already sealed those four acupoints with a simple wave. I've never seen such lightning fast yet extremely accurate acupoint-sealing techniques. That was something! I couldn't help but admire him. After he sealed my acupoints, all six freaks let out of a breath of relief as if relieved of a heavy load. They said, 'This stinking...stinking...stinking fart tank won't be able to release his stinking gas now.'

"The one who sealed my acupoints asked again, 'Hey, where on earth is that guy? If you don't tell us, I'll never release your sealed acupoints. Think about it, having gas yet not being able to let it out. You are gonna feel really bloated!'

"I thought to myself that when six freaks with such outstanding Kung Fu skills came to Mount Huashan, it's

obvious that they wouldn't be looking for any ordinary person. Brother Linghu, at that time your respectful Master, Mr. Yue, and his wife weren't on Mount Huashan. Even if they had come back, then of course they would be back in the 'House of Integrity' and would be very easy to locate. I thought about it back and forth and could only come up with one logical answer. Those six freaks must be looking for your Grand Uncle-Master, Grandmaster Feng."

Linghu Chong felt a shock in his heart. "Did you tell them?" he asked in a hurry.

"Bah! What kind of person do you think I am?" Tian Boguang was very displeased. "I have already promised you that I would never let out Grandmaster Feng's whereabouts. Are you saying that I, a gallant man, was just talking out of my ass?"

"Pardon me, brother Tian! My bad! Please don't mind," Linghu Chong apologized.

"If you still look down upon me, we'd better just sever at one blow - make it a clean break, and starting from now on, we are no friends."

Linghu Chong remained silent and thought to himself, "You are the evil rapist that everyone in the Martial World holds in contempt. Who would ever consider you a friend? But since you could have killed me multiple times yet you never did, so I guess I do owe you a debt of gratitude."

In the darkness, Tian Boguang couldn't get a good look at Linghu Chong's expression. Assuming that Linghu Chong's silence meant his compromise, he continued on.

"Those six freaks just kept asking me. I said loudly, 'I know the whereabouts of this person, but I will never tell. There are countless of peaks and valleys and caves on Mount Huashan. I am not going to tell you, and you will never find him in this life?'

"Those six freaks were enraged. They tormented and tortured me. But I simply ignored them afterwards. Brother Linghu, those six freaks' Kung Fu skills are very eccentric.



You'd better go tell Grandmaster Feng quickly. Even though his sword skills are splendid, it's still better prepared than getting surprised."

Tian Boguang mentioned that "The six freaks tormented and tortured me" in a very casual way, but Linghu Chong could easily imagine how much cruel and brutal torments actually were put on him and how much excruciating pain and suffering he had to endure. The six freaks had good intentions when they tried to heal his wounds, and what happened? Even now he was still suffering from the consequence. When they coerced Tian Boguang into telling the answer, it was not hard to imagine how nasty they could be. Feeling quite sorry for Tian Boguang, he said to him.

"You are a true man who keeps his words. You would rather die than let out my Grand Uncle-Master Feng's whereabouts. But...but those Peach Valley's Six Fairies were really looking for me, not my Grand Uncle-Master Feng."

"Looking for you? Why are they looking for you?" Tian Boguang felt a big shock going through his entire body.

"They are just like you and were asked by little apprentice sister Yilin to invite me to go see...see her," Linghu Chong answered.

That left Tian Boguang completely traumatized. He opened his mouth wide, yet nothing came out of it except deep groans. After a long while, Tian Boguang finally came back to his senses and spoke again.

"If I had known those six freaks were looking for you, I would have told them everything right away. Once those six freaks invite you over, I can just follow behind instead of rotting here on Mount Huashan dying from the poison. Well, if those six freaks got you, how come they didn't carry you to go see the little Sister?"

"That's really a long story," Linghu Chong heaved a deep sigh. "Brother Tian, did you say something about rotting here on Huashan dying from the poison?"

“Didn’t I tell you earlier that someone sealed my Death Acupoints and planted strong poison in my body so he could compel me into inviting you over within one month to meet that little Sister? Only after I completed the mission successfully would he release my acupoints and give me the antidote. But I could neither invite you over, nor take you there by force, and ended up having wounds all over me from the torturing of those six freaks. It’s only like ten days away from the date the poison is scheduled to activate.”

“Where is little apprentice sister Yilin? How many days do you think it will take to get there?” Linghu Chong asked.

“You are willing to go now?” Tian Boguang asked.

“You spared my life on more than one occasion. Although you had many improper behaviors, I can’t just watch you die of poison for my sake right in front of my eyes. On that day when you tried to coerce me into complying, of course I would not bend. But it’s a completely different situation now,” Linghu Chong answered.

“The little Sister is in Shanxi Province. Alas...if we were still fit, it wouldn’t take more than six or seven days to get there on fast horses. But since we are both in such bad shape, forget about that,” Tian Boguang commented.

“I am only waiting for my final time here on Mount Huashan anyway. I’ll go with you. Who knows? Maybe God will give his blessings, so we will be able to hire some fast wagons that will take us into Shanxi Province within ten days,” Linghu Chong suggested.

“I have committed countless crimes in my life and harmed many innocent people. Why would God give me his blessings? Unless God had gone blind.” Tian Boguang grinned.

“Hmm, sometimes...sometimes God...does go blind. We are going to die anyway. There’s nothing to lose for trying it out.”

“That’s right! What’s the difference whether I die on the road or on Mount Huashan?” Tian Boguang applauded. “I

think the first thing we need to do is to go down the mountain and find something to eat. Ever since I was dumped here, I could only eat unripe chestnuts off the ground. I am really craving for some decent food. Can you get up? Let me give you a hand."

He offered to "give a hand," yet couldn't even get up himself. Linghu Chong wanted to give him a prop, but didn't have any strength either. The two of them struggled for a while but achieved no progress whatsoever. Suddenly, both of them burst into loud laughter.

"I've been wandering in the Martial World for years, yet to find any bosom friend. But today I get to die here together with brother Linghu. What a joy it is!" Tian Boguang said.

"Later when my Master sees our corpses, he probably would assume that the two of us have ended in a common ruin after a fierce fight. Who would have guessed that we were still calling each other brothers before we kicked the bucket?" Linghu Chong let out a grin.

Tian Boguang reached out with his hand. "Brother Linghu, let's shake hands before we die."

Linghu Chong hesitated. Obviously Tian Boguang wanted to be intimate friends with him and share a common destiny. But Tian was the notorious evil rapist, and he was the disciple of a reputable sword school. How could he make friends with someone like Tian? That day when he beat Tian several times in the contests and spared his life each time, he could still attribute that to the fact that Tian spared his life multiple times first. But to still mangle up with him today really couldn't be justified at all. With those thoughts, he reached out with his hand but stopped half way.

Tian Boguang only thought that Linghu Chong's wounds were too severe that he simply didn't have enough strength to move his arm. So he said loudly, "Brother Linghu, you are my intimate friend now. If you die because of your wounds before I die, I swear that I will not stay living alone."

Touched by the sincerity in Tian Boguang's words, Linghu Chong thought, "He surely deserves to be called a true friend." So he reached out with his hands and held Tian's right hand. "Brother Tian, at least we won't be heading to the underworld alone and die a lonely death," Linghu Chong said with a smile.

Before his words even faded, he suddenly heard a gloomy sneer rise from behind his back. Then a voice said, "Who would have expected the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School Qi-Branch to have sunk so low and made friends with a notorious evil rapist?"

"Who are you?" Tian Boguang yelled out.

Linghu Chong couldn't help but groan inwardly, "It's no big deal that I am gonna die from my severe wounds, but now I've just put Master's reputation in jeopardy. How terrible!"

In the darkness, he could vaguely see a shadow standing next to him with a long sword in his hand. The blade flashed dimly from the starlight.

"Linghu Chong, it's still not too late to take back what you said. Take this sword and waste that Tian-named evil rapist, then nobody will condemn you for making friends with him," the shadow said with a sneer as he threw his sword down, which cut into the ground and stood by its own.

Linghu Chong noticed that the blade of the sword was wide and broad - it was the type of sword used by the Songshan Sword School. So he asked,

"Which respectful member of the Songshan Sword School are you?"

"You surely have sharp eyes. I am Di Xiu from Songshan Sword School," the man answered.

"So it's apprentice brother Di. We haven't had much chance to get to know each other. What respectful business are you tending here on Mount Huashan?" Linghu Chong asked.

“Head Uncle-Master<sup>9</sup> gave me the order to come to Mount Huashan and go on a trip of inspection to check if apprentices of the Huashan Sword School are really having bad conducts as the rumor says. Ha-ha, I didn’t expect to hear you speak straight from the heart about making friends with that evil rapist, right after I climb up Mount Huashan. I didn’t see that coming at all!” Di Xiu answered.

“You god damned punk, you think your Songshan Sword School is any better? Why don’t you go check on your own ill behavior before poking your nose into other people’s business?” Tian Boguang cursed.

Di Xiu raised his foot and threw a heavy kick at Tian Boguang’s head. “Humph, your end is imminent and you still won’t shut your dirty mouth?” he yelled. But Tian Boguang kept pouring out streams of abuses non-stop. It would have been a walkover if Di Xiu had wanted to kill Tian Boguang, but he decided to give Linghu Chong a good amount of humiliation first.

“Linghu Chong,” he sneered, “since the two of you find each other’s stinks congenial, I suppose you’ve made up your mind not to kill him?”

Linghu Chong was furious. He yelled loudly, “Whether I kill him or not, it’s none of your business. Give me the deathblow if you’ve got any guts. If you have no guts, then get your tail between your legs and get your ass off Mount Huashan.”

“So you are sure you won’t kill him, and would rather consider that evil rapist your good friend?” Di Xiu asked.

“No matter who I have as my friend, it beats having you as a friend,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Right on! Way to go!” Tian Boguang cheered loudly.

“You just want to enrage me and provoke me into killing the two of you with a single blow. It’s not going to be that easy. I am going to strip off your clothes and tie you two together naked. Then I’ll seal your Mute Acupoint<sup>10</sup> and put on a tour of display around the Martial World. I’ll tell

everyone that I caught a macho guy and a sissy boy right when they were doing their illicit dirty stuff. Ha-ha, your Master Yue Buqun of the Huashan Sword School always pretends benevolence and righteousness, and puts on a face of a Confucian moralist to fool people. After today, would he still dare to call himself 'Gentleman Sword'?"

These words made Linghu Chong's anger explode, which knocked him out cold.

"Go to hell you...." Tian Boguang cursed, but his voice halted abruptly when Di Xiu sealed his acupoint around his waist with a swift kick.

With an evil grin on his face, Di Xiu reached out to start untying Linghu Chong's robe. Suddenly, a soft and brisk female voice rose behind his back.

"Hello, big brother, what are you doing here?"

In great surprise, Di Xiu turned his head around for a glance. In the dim light he could vaguely make out the shape of a woman. So he responded, "What are you doing here?"

Tian Boguang immediately recognized the girl's voice. It was none other than Yilin's voice. With a tremendous amount of joy, he shouted.

"Little...little Sister, it's you! That's wonderful. This god damned rat wants to...wants to kill your big brother Linghu."

He was going to say, "This god damned rat wants to kill me." But then a quick thought came upon him: Yilin wouldn't care about the "me" much at all. So he quickly changed that to "your big brother Linghu."

Hearing that the man lying on the ground was actually Linghu Chong, Yilin was greatly worried. Wasting no time, she leapt forward and called out, "Big brother Linghu, is that you?"

Noticing how preoccupied Yilin was and how she put on no guard against him, Di Xiu bent his arm slightly and jabbed toward her acupoint under her rib cage with his index finger. His finger was just about to touch her clothes when suddenly his back collar tightened up as someone lifted him several

feet off the ground. Terrified, Di Xiu elbowed back with his right arm, but it hit nothing. He immediately followed with a back kick using his left foot, but it hit nothing either. Horrified, he grabbed back with his hands when a huge hand came to his throat with a tight grip. Instantly, he could hardly breathe and lost all his strength to struggle.

By the time Linghu Chong slowly regained his consciousness, the first thing he noticed was a girl's worried voice calling out, "Big brother Linghu! Big brother Linghu!" It sounded vaguely like the voice of Yilin. He opened his eyes, and sure enough, under the dim starlight, the pretty white face right in front of his eyes was no other than Yilin's.

A thundering voice suddenly exploded, "Lin'er,<sup>11</sup> is this cripple the Linghu Chong you have mentioned?"

Linghu Chong looked up toward the origin of the voice, and what he saw shocked him. A chubby and enormous giant monk stood there, more like an iron tower than a human. The monk was at least seven feet tall. He extended his left arm out horizontally and lifted Di Xiu off the ground. Di Xiu's arms hang still by his side. It was hard to tell if he was still breathing or not.

"Dad, he...he is big brother Linghu. But he is not a cripple," Yilin said. She never took her eyes off Linghu Chong when she spoke and her eyes were filled with care, concern, and affection. It almost looked as if she really wanted to reach out to caress Linghu Chong's face but was afraid to do it.

Linghu Chong was astounded. He couldn't help but think to himself, "You are a little nun. How come you are calling this giant monk Dad? A monk having a daughter is already shocking, now when his daughter is actually a nun is simply appalling!"

The giant monk let out some more thunder-like laughter. "You yearned for this Linghu Chong days and nights. I thought he must be a bulky and heroic looking guy. It turned out he's just a tiny loser who couldn't even fight back when

bullied and had to pretend to be dead on the ground. What a cripple! I'd never want him as my son-in-law. Forget about him. Let's go."

"Who said I yearned for him days and nights?" Yilin rebuked him in great embarrassment. "You...you always like to talk nonsense. If you want to go, you can go by yourself. You don't want...want...." She simply couldn't repeat the words "don't want him as son-in-law."

Hearing that this monk had referred to him again and again as a "cripple" and a "loser," Linghu Chong became furious. "Go as you wish! Who asked you to stay?" he scorned.

"You can't go! You can't go!" Tian Boguang shouted in worry.

"Why can't he go?" Linghu Chong asked.

"I need him to release my Death Acupoints. I also need his antidotes for the strong poison planted in me. If he leaves, I am dead and gone!" Tian Boguang said.

"Are you afraid now? I said that I'd die together with you, didn't I. Once your poison activates, I'll just cut my own throat to go along with you."

The giant monk chortled and the thundering sound echoed in the valley.

"Excellent! Excellent! Excellent! So this lad actually has some backbone. Lin'er, he is certainly to my liking. But there's one more thing I have to get a clear answer. Does he drink wine or not?"

Before Yilin even had a chance to answer, Linghu Chong had already yelled out. "I certainly do. Why not? Your old man here drinks in the mornings, in the evenings, and even in my dreams. Once you get to see how addicted I am, I assure you that you'll tremble with rage because you are a damn monk whose commandments prohibit you from eating flesh, drinking wine, killing people, saying lies, and blah, blah, blah!"



“Lin’er, you tell him. What’s your dad’s name for the Buddhist’s order?”<sup>12</sup> The giant monk broke into a loud laughter.

“Big brother Linghu, my dad’s name in the Buddhist’s order is called ‘No Commandment’,” Yilin explained with a smile. “He is a member of the Buddhist order, but he doesn’t follow any of the regulations, taboos, and commandments for Buddhists, that’s why his name in the Buddhist’s order is called ‘No Commandment.’ Now, please don’t laugh at this. He drinks wine, eats flesh, kills people, steals money, and even...even gave...gave birth to me.” At that final word, she could no longer hold her amusement and broke into giggles.

“Hey, I am very delighted...delighted to meet monks of this type!” Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter. He struggled to stand up, but was short of enough strength. Yilin rushed to prod him up.

“Uncle,” Linghu Chong said with a smile, “since you are open to all kinds of things, why don’t you simply resume secular life? There’s no need to put yourself in this Buddhist robe.”

“Aha, there’s something you don’t know. Because I am open to all things, that’s how I decided to become a monk. I fell in love with a beautiful nun just like you....” Monk No Commandment explained.

“Dad, you are talking nonsense without thinking again,” Yilin cut him off. Her face was completely red from a blush; fortunately, it was dark at night, so no one noticed it.

“A true man is always open and aboveboard. I did it, and I admit it, regardless of how others laugh at me or condemn me. Monk No Commandment is a true man that speaks the truth! What’s there to be afraid of?” Monk No Commandment replied.

“Precisely!” Linghu Chong and Tian Boguang cheered in unison.

Hearing the agreements, Monk No Commandment was quite pleased, so he continued, “The beautiful nun that I fell

in love with was, of course, her mother.”

“Turned out that little apprentice sister Yilin’s dad is a monk and her mother is a nun,” Linghu Chong thought to himself amusedly.

Monk No Commandment went on, “I was a butcher at that time and fell in love with her mother, but her mother paid no attention to me. I was at my wit’s end and had no other choice but to join the Buddhist’s order. I thought that since nuns and monks are all members of the Buddhist’s order, like a big family, then when a nun doesn’t love a butcher, maybe she would love a monk.”

“Dad, when are you going to watch your mouth before you speak? You are already a grown up, but you still talk like a child,” Yilin said with a spat.

“Did I speak the untruth? But at the time I didn’t realize that once one becomes a monk, he can no longer go out with any woman, not even nuns, and it was actually more difficult for me to date her mom, so I didn’t want to be a monk no more. But my teacher insisted that I had some kind of trait perfect for a member of the Buddhist order, so he refused to let me resume secular life. Her mother somehow got muddleheaded and was deeply moved by my true love, and soon this little nun came to this world. Chong, it’s much easier for you now. You don’t have to join the Buddhist’s order and become a monk to date my little nun daughter.”

Linghu Chong was greatly embarrassed. He thought to himself, “When apprentice sister Yilin was taken prisoner by Tian Boguang, I put in my effort following the righteous course. She is a nun from the Heng-Shan Sword School who believes in Buddhism. How can she get involved into love relationship with any secular man? It was probably only because she met men close to her age the first time and lost control of herself temporarily that she sent Tian Boguang and Peach Valley’s Six Fairies to invite me over. I must avoid her as soon as possible. If the reputation of the Huashan Sword School and the Heng-Shan Sword School were damaged in

any way because of me, even if I died, Master and Master-Wife would still condemn me, and little apprentice sister Lingshan would still look down upon me.”

Yilin looked very bashful. “Dad, big brother Linghu already...already has the person of his heart. He would never pay attention to others. You...you...you’d better never mention that again. You would only get laughed at.”

“This chap has another lover? This is pissing me off!” Monk No Commandment yelled angrily. He reached forward with his right arm. The huge palm, almost as big as a cattail leaf fan, shot at Linghu Chong’s chest. Linghu Chong couldn’t even keep his balance let alone dodge the attack. The hand got a good grip of Linghu Chong’s robe and lifted him off the ground.

With his left hand grabbing at Di Xiu’s back collar and his right hand grabbing at Linghu Chong’s chest, Monk No Commandment extended both of his arms out flat and looked as if he was carrying the two with a shoulder pole. Linghu Chong didn’t have much strength to start with, now in the mid air, he hung there like a ragged bag.

“Dad, put big brother Linghu down immediately! If you don’t put him down, I am gonna be angry now,” Yilin shouted in a hurry.

As soon as Monk No Commandment heard the word “angry” from his daughter, he dropped Linghu Chong in no time, looking very afraid. “Which beautiful little nun did he set his eyes on? This is outrageous!” he babbled. Since he had fallen in love with a beautiful nun, he felt that other than beautiful nuns, there wasn’t anyone else who deserved to be loved.

“The person of big brother Linghu’s heart is his apprentice sister Miss Yue,” Yilin explained.

Monk No Commandment let out a loud roar, which created an uncomfortable buzz in everyone’s ears. “Who’s this girl named Yue?” he yelled. “Damn it! If she isn’t a

beautiful little nun, what's so lovely about her? I'll break the damn girl's little neck as soon as I see her!"

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "This Monk No Commandment is a crude and reckless man, and he is similar to the Peach Valley's Six Fairies in a sense. Seems that he will live up to his words. What if he really harms the little apprentice sister?"

"Dad, big brother Linghu is severely wounded. Please hurry to heal his wounds. There's plenty of time to talk over other things later," Yilin suggested, feeling greatly worried.

Monk No Commandment always acted upon whatever his daughter said. "That's fine. Let's heal his wounds. What's so difficult about that?" he said. He tossed Di Xiu behind his back with a random wave and then asked Linghu Chong loudly, "How were you wounded?" Cries of pain continued as Di Xiu rolled down the small hill.

"I took a palm strike from someone on my chest. But that wasn't critical...." Linghu Chong replied.

"Palm strike on the chest? He must have shaken your Ren Passage pretty good...." Monk No Commandment concluded.

"The Peach Valley...." Linghu Chong tried to explain.

"There's no whatever Peach Valley in the Ren Passage," Monk No Commandment cut him off. "Your Huashan School's inner energy is no good, no wonder you don't understand. Sure, there's one called Combined Valley Acupoint among the various human acupoints, but that belongs to the Hand-To-Intestine Yang-Ming Channel and is positioned right between thumb and index finger. It has nothing to do with the Ren Passage. Very well, let me heal your wound in the Ren Passage."

"No, no! The Peach Valley's Six...." Linghu Chong said in a hurry.

"What Peach Valley Six, Peach Valley Seven?" Monk No Commandment waved him off. "Among the various acupoints, there're Hand-Three-Li, Foot-Three-Li, Yin-Ling-Quan, and Si-Kong-Zhu. Where did Peach Valley Six or Peach

Valley Seven come from? Now shut up and stop the nonsense.” At that word, he swung his hand and sealed Linghu Chong’s Mute Point.

“I’ll send my supreme inner energy into your Ren Passage through the Cheng-Jiang, Tian-Tu, Tan-Zhong, Jiu-Wei, Ju-Yue, Zhong-Wan, Qi-Hai, Shi-Men, Guan-Yuan, and Zhong-Ji Acupoints. Your wound will heal as soon as my energy flows through. I bet that after seven or eight days, you’ll be back to normal, as cool as a cucumber,” Monk No Commandment said as he reached out with the two fan-sized hands.

He placed his right hand on the Cheng-Jiang Acupoint by Linghu Chong’s chin, and his left hand on the Zhong-Ji Acupoint by Linghu Chong’s lower abdomen, and then started sending two streams of inner energy in through the two acupoints. All of a sudden, he felt a tremendous shock from his hands as the two streams of energy clashed with the six energy streams left by the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies. Astounded, he uttered a cry of surprise.

“Dad, how did it go?” Yilin asked in a hurry.

“There are several bizarre energy streams in his body,” Monk No Commandment responded. “One, two, three, four. There are a total of four...wait...there’s one more. That’s a total of five energy streams. These five energy streams...Aha, another one came out. What the hell, six streams of energy! Fine! Let’s see who’s tougher? Your god damned six energy streams or my two streams of energy? Maybe there’s even more. Ha-ha, kind of crowded, huh? This is so much fun! Come on, come and get me. Humph, no more, right? There are only six. Did you think I, Monk No Commandment, would be afraid of you puny rascals?” He pressed hard on the two acupoints of Linghu Chong’s, and white steam began to come out from the top of his head. At the beginning, he was still able to call out, but soon, as he worked hard to gather more and more inner energy, he had no strength left to make any sound. By then, it was almost time for daybreak, and it was getting brighter and brighter. The white steam on top of

his head became thicker and thicker as if a heavy mist had completely surrounded his giant head.

After a long while, he finally drew his hands back and burst into loud laughter. Suddenly, the laughter halted abruptly, and with a heavy thump, Monk No Commandment collapsed down to the ground.

In great astonishment, Yilin cried out, "Dad, Dad!" She dashed by his side to help him up. But Monk No Commandment was simply too heavy, only half way up, the two fell back down to the ground again.

Monk No Commandment's clothes were soaked with sweat. Panting heavily, he still cursed in a trembling voice, "God...God...God damned...God...God...God damned...."

Hearing the curses from him, Yilin relaxed a little. "Dad, what's wrong? Are you exhausted?" she asked.

"Damn it!" Monk No Commandment cursed, "There are six streams of tough energy inside the lad's body, and they wanted to have a fight...fight with me. Damn it! After I gathered up my inner energy, I have already overpowered those six streams of weird energy. Hmm, you can relax now. This lad won't die."

Yilin felt great comfort. She turned around to look, and sure enough, saw Linghu Chong stand up slowly.

"Hey, the monk's inner energy is pretty tough indeed. It only took him minutes to heal brother Linghu's severe wounds," Tian Boguang praised with a smile.

Monk No Commandment was quite pleased to hear the praise. He replied, "You have committed countless crimes. I was thinking of killing you with a simple squeeze, but since you did find the lad Linghu Chong and do deserve a little bit of credit, I am going to spare your life. Now get your ass out of here."

Tian Boguang was furious. He cursed, "What the devil are you talking about, you god damned monk? What kind of garbage is that? You said that if I found Linghu Chong for you within one month, you would release my sealed Death

Acupoints and give me the antidote to the poison. Are you going back on your words? If you don't release my acupoints and give me the antidote, then you are no better than a filthy pig, you god damned monk."

These vicious curses didn't anger Monk No Commandment at all. He grinned. "Look at this stinking chap. Look at the coward look on him, afraid that I, Monk No Commandment would go back on my words and not give him the antidote. You dirty skunk, here's the antidote."

He reached into his pocket for the antidote, but because of the great strength he had just spent on Linghu Chong, his hand couldn't help but tremble. The china bottle fell out of his hand multiple times. Yilin reached over and picked up the bottle, then opened the lid.

"Give him three pills. Take the first pill, and then wait three days before taking another one. After that, wait another six days before taking the third one. But if you get killed during the nine days, don't you blame it on me," Monk No Commandment said.

"Hey monk, you forced me to take poison and now gave me the antidote. I am already being nice by not cursing you. Don't expect me to thank you for that. How about my sealed Death Acupoints?" Tian Boguang asked as he took the antidote from Yilin's hands.

"Those acupoints I sealed had released automatically after seven days. If I had really sealed your Death Acupoint, do you think you would still be standing here alive today?" Monk No Commandment laughed out loud.

Tian Boguang had sensed that those acupoints were already released earlier. Now hearing these words from Monk No Commandment, he finally relaxed.

"God damn it! You lying monk!" he swore with a big smile.

Turning his head to Linghu Chong, he said, "Brother Linghu, I know you must have things to talk to the little Sister. Farewell for now. If all goes well, we'll meet again

someday!" He cupped his hand before turning around to follow the main path down the mountain.

"Please wait, brother Tian," Linghu Chong called out.

"Why?" Tian Boguang asked.

"Brother Tian," Linghu Chong said, "thanks for showing me mercy during those several fights. I will make you a friend, but there's one advice I'd like to give you. If you don't listen to me, our friendship won't last long."

"I know what you mean," Tian Boguang grinned. "You want me to stop the kind of trash like raping and stuff. Fine, I'll listen to your advice. There are plenty of sluts and whores around. Although I am fond of women, I don't have to prey on innocent girls or get them killed. Ha-ha, brother Linghu, wasn't it a fantastic scene at the Hengshan Jade House?"

Hearing him mention of the Hengshan Jade House, Linghu Chong and Yilin both flushed. Laughing out loud, Tian Boguang walked away, but after only a couple of steps, his knee gave out all of a sudden. Falling on the ground heavily, he found himself rolling down a small slope. Finally the rolling came to a halt and Tian Boguang managed to sit up after some struggle. Taking out one antidote pill, he swallowed it down his throat, and instantly, severe stomachache consumed him. He sat on the ground and had no extra strength left to even move a muscle. Knowing that this was a normal process to neutralize the kind of strong poison he had, he did not panic at all and just waited patiently for the antidote to take its course.

Earlier when Monk No Commandment pumped the two streams of forceful inner energy into Linghu Chong's body, which effectively repressed the six energy streams from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, Linghu Chong felt so much better. All the nausea seemed to have gone away and he could feel that he was regaining some of this strength from his legs. Welled with joy, he walked forward and bowed to Monk No Commandment with deep respect.



“Great Master,<sup>13</sup> thank you for saving my life! I am truly grateful!”

“No need to thank me! Ha-ha, we are a big family now. You are my son-in-law and I am your father-in-law. What’s there to thank for?” Monk No Commandment let out a big grin.

“Dad, you...you are talking nonsense again.” Yilin’s face turned completely red.

“Why? Why is that nonsense? You yearned for him days and nights. Don’t you want to marry him? Even if you can’t marry him, don’t you want to make a pretty baby little nun with him?” Monk No Commandment asked in surprise.

“You...you...who wanted...who...?” Yilin spitted in embarrassment.

Sound of footsteps came from the mountain path, and moments later two people showed up. It was Yue Buqun and his daughter Yue Lingshan.

Struck by surprise and joy at the same time, Linghu Chong greeted in a hurry. “Master, little apprentice sister, you are back! Where’s Master-Wife?” he called out.

Noticing that Linghu Chong was much fitter and looked nothing close to the weak look when he had the last gasp the day before, Yue Buqun felt quite happy, but it was not time to ask him yet. Instead, he cupped his hands toward Monk No Commandment.

“May I be enlightened to hear your respectful name, Great Master? What brought you to our shabby residence?” he asked.

“My name is Monk No Commandment. I came to your shabby residence to look for my son-in-law,” Monk No Commandment replied and pointed at Linghu Chong. He came from being a butcher and didn’t know the kind of polite formula scholars would exchange at greetings. Since Yue Buqun said “shabby residence,” he simply copied it.

Yue Buqun had no clue as who this monk was. When he heard the monk say, “I came to look for my son-in-law,” he

thought that the monk was actually spitting out insults intentionally. Although angered, he kept a calm face and only replied, "Great Master, you must be joking." Seeing that Yilin came forward to salute him, he inquired, "Nephew apprentice Yilin, did your Master send you here to Mount Huashan?"

Yilin flushed slightly as she replied, "No. I...I..."

Yue Buqun paid no more attention to Yilin and turned to Tian Boguang.

"Humph! Tian Boguang, you sure have a lot of guts!"

"I get along with your apprentice Linghu Chong, so I carried two jars of wine up Mount Huashan for a good drink with him. That doesn't take a lot of guts," Tian Boguang replied.

"Where's the wine then?" Yue Buqun's face turned sterner.

"We finished it on top of the 'Cliff of Contemplation' a long time ago."

Yue Buqun turned to Linghu Chong. "Is that true?" he asked.

"Master," Linghu Chong answered, "that was a long story. Please allow me to explain in details."

"How long has Tian Boguang been on Mount Huashan?"

"About half a month."

"During the half a month, was he on Mount Huashan all the time?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you report to me?" Yue Buqun asked in a stern voice.

"Master and Master-Wife weren't here at the time," Linghu Chong answered.

"Where were we then?"

"You were in Chang-An Town chasing Mister Tian."

Yue Buqun let out a snort. "Mister Tian? Humph, Mister Tian! You knew he committed countless of cruel crimes; why didn't you slay him with your sword? Even if you couldn't

beat him, you should have died fighting him, why did you make friends with him in fear for your life?"

"I didn't want to kill him. What could he do? Kill himself with his own sword because he couldn't beat me in a fight?" Tian Boguang interrupted. Still not able to stand up, he remained sitting on the ground.

"What makes you think you are allowed to talk in front of me?" Yue Buqun retorted. He said to Linghu Chong, "Go kill him!"

"Father, big apprentice brother has severe wounds. He shouldn't fight anyone!" Yue Lingshan couldn't help but interrupt.

"Wasn't that evil rapist seriously wounded, just as well? What are you worrying about? I am here. Do you think I will allow that villain to injure my apprentice?" Yue Buqun said.

Yue Buqun knew that Linghu Chong was cunning and crafty, and hated evil as if it were his personal enemy. In addition, Tian Boguang had wounded him just recently, so for sure, he would not make true friends with that evil rapist. Perhaps he resorted to a battle of wits after failing the batter of strength. At the moment, Tian Boguang had been seriously wounded, and probably that would have attributed to Linghu Chong's effort, already. That was why when he heard that Linghu Chong had made friends with the evil rapist, he wasn't angry for real, and only ordered Linghu Chong to kill the villain. That would not only rid the people of a scourge, but also make a name for a young apprentice. Yue Buqun was sure that at Tian Boguang's current state, even if he could still fight Linghu Chong to a tie, he would stand no chance against even a slight snap attack from Yue himself. But to his surprise, Linghu Chong replied,

"Master, this brother Tian has promised me that he will sincerely mend his ways starting from now on and never harm any innocent woman. I know that he is a man of his word, why don't we...?"

“What...what makes you believe that he is a man of his word? How can one discuss word of honor with such a villain who has committed crimes for which even death cannot atone? How many innocent lives have perished under his murderous knife? What good is it that we martial people practice martial arts if we don't slay this type of evil? Lingshan, hand your sword over to your big apprentice brother,” Yue Buqun yelled, in a stern voice.

“Yes!” Yue Lingshan replied. She unsheathed her sword and handed the sword to Linghu Chong, handle first.

Linghu Chong found himself in a very awkward situation. He never dared to go against his Master's orders, but earlier on the verge of death, he had already shaken hands with Tian Boguang and made friends with him. In addition, Tian Boguang had promised to correct his errors and make a fresh start. Although Tian Boguang committed countless crimes before, he was one who would truly keep his words. If Linghu Chong killed him now, it wouldn't feel right. He took the sword from Yue Lingshan and started stumbling toward Tian Boguang. After a dozen steps or so, he pretended that his legs were too weak because of the several wounds of his. Bending his left knee all of a sudden, he threw himself to the ground, and with a thud, the long sword in his hand penetrated his left shin.

No one had expected that to happen, and all cried out in shock. Yilin and Yue Lingshan both dashed toward him, but Yilin halted only after her first step, thinking to herself that how could she, a member of the Buddhist order, show her care and affection to a young man in public.

“Big apprentice brother, are you alright?” Yue Lingshan rushed by Linghu Chong and cried out.

Linghu Chong did not answer, his eyes shut tight.

Yue Lingshan grabbed hold of the sword handle and gave it a pull. The sword came out as blood gushed out from the wound like a spring. She hurriedly took out some medication of the Huashan School and applied them onto Linghu

Chong's wound on his leg. When she looked up by chance, she suddenly noticed the worried pale face of Yilin that was covered by care and concern. Yue Lingshan felt a thump in her heart as she thought to herself, "This little nun surely cares for big apprentice brother very much!"

"Dad, let me slay that evil villain." Yue Lingshan stood up with her sword in hand.

"If you kill that villain, you would stain your reputation for nothing. Give the sword to me!" Yue Buqun directed.

Tian Boguang was such an infamous rapist that his name was well known by many. Yue Buqun worried that when the news spread out later that Miss Yue had killed Tian Boguang, it was destined that some rascals would cook up many stories about how there was an attempted rape, so on and so forth.

Hearing her father's words, Yue Lingshan handed the sword over, but Yue Buqun did not take the sword, instead, he flicked his right sleeve, which wrapped the sword inside.

"No!" Monk No Commandment shouted when he saw the scene. He quickly took off his two shoes and held them in his hands. Yue Buqun swung his arm with a chop stance; the long sword shot toward Tian Boguang, who was in a distance of a hundred feet or so, like a missile. That was well expected by Monk No Commandment. He threw hard with both of his arms; the two shoes also shot out in great speed. The sword was heavy and the shoes were light, plus that the sword was thrown before the two shoes, but somehow the two shoes were able to fly in front of the sword in an arch and circled back. Each shoe hooked onto one side of the sword handle and actually was able to send the long sword back toward where it was thrown. The sword flew a couple dozens of feet back and then finally lost its momentum and fell to the ground. The sword tip penetrated the soil and kept the sword standing. The two shoes were still hooked on the handle and swayed back and forth.

"That was terrible! Terrible!" Monk No Commandment shouted. "Lin'er, your daddy spent too much inner energy on

the son-in-law's internal wounds today. That's why the sword fell only half way through. It should have flown to only two feet from the son-in-law's Master and give him a good scare. Alas, your daddy monk has really lost face this time. This is so embarrassing!"

Throwing a glance at Yue Buqun's unhappy face, Yilin whispered, "Dad, enough." She hurried forward and removed the two shoes off the sword handle. Pulling the sword off the ground, she hesitated. She knew that Linghu Chong didn't want to kill Tian Boguang. If she had given the sword back to Yue Lingshan, and she went to kill Tian Boguang again, wouldn't that break Linghu Chong's heart?

When Yue Buqun swung his arm and shot out the long sword with his sleeve, he thought that for sure the sword would cut through Tian Boguang's heart. Who had expected that Monk No Commandment was actually able to put so much strength onto his two shoes with such a clever maneuver? This monk kept yelling out loud, referring himself as the little nun's father and calling Linghu Chong his son-in-law, full of nonsense. Obviously he was just a mad monk, but his Kung Fu skills are indeed outstanding. Didn't he say that he just spent a good amount of his inner energy to heal Linghu Chong's internal wounds? If it hadn't been so, wouldn't he be even more exceptional? Although he didn't use the Divine Art of Violet Twilight when he flicked with his sleeve, and he was sure he wouldn't lose to the monk if he had actually used it, still, it wouldn't be appropriate for a renowned master to strike again once the first strike had missed. So he cupped his hand and said, "Very admirable! Great Master, since you are determined to take this villain under your wings, it would be inappropriate for me to intervene today. What do you think?"

Hearing him say that he wouldn't kill Tian Boguang today, Yilin held the long sword in both hands and walked in front of Yue Lingshan. Bowing slightly, she said, "Sister, you...."

Yue Lingshan snorted as she grabbed hold of the sword handle. Without even looking, she returned the sword back to its sheath. The shove appeared to be neat and swift.

Monk No Commandment chortled. "Miss, that was a handsome trick!" He turned to Linghu Chong and said, "My little son-in-law, let's go. Your apprentice sister is very pretty. I'd be nervous to leave you and her together."

"Great Master, I know you like to kid around. But remarks like that would damage the reputation of both the Heng-Shan and the Huashan sword schools. Will you please stop that?" Linghu Chong demanded.

"What? When we finally found you and saved your life after so much trouble, now you don't want to marry my daughter?" Monk No Commandment was astonished.

Linghu Chong put on a solemn face. "Linghu Chong dares not ever forget the kindness Great Master has shown by saving my life. Apprentice sister Yilin's Heng-Shen Sword School has very strict school rules. If you keep making such meaningless jokes, it wouldn't look good for the two senior sisters Ding Xian and Ding Yi."

"Lin'er, what...what...what's up with this son-in-law? I...I don't get it!" Monk No Commandment scratched his head hard.

Yilin covered her face with both hands and cried, "Dad, enough! Enough! He does his things and I do my own. Why...why...why mix us together?" Tears burst out from her eyes as she dashed down the mountain path.

Monk No Commandment was even more confused. He dazed for a moment and then muttered, "This is so strange! Before seeing him, she would give up everything to see him, but once she sees him, she didn't want to see him anymore. She is just like her mother. It's simply impossible to understand what a little nun might be thinking." Seeing that his daughter was getting further and further, he chased after her.

Tian Boguang managed to stand up after some struggle. "The green mountain will always be green and the blue river will continue to flow. I'll see you around," he said to Linghu Chong and then turned around and stumbled his way down the mountain path.

Yue Buqun waited till Tian Boguang had gone far before speaking to Linghu Chong again, "Chong, you are treating that evil villain well. You would rather stab yourself than kill him."

Linghu Chong's face showed some shame. He knew that Master had seen through his act with his sharp eyes. He lowered his head.

"Master, he did have many bad conducts, but he has promised to mend his ways and do good. He has shown mercy and spared my life multiple times when he had me in his hands."

"Talking morality with such a brutal and cold-blooded skunk, sooner or later, you will have to pay for it," Yue Buqun sneered. He had always favored this Head Apprentice of his. Seeing that he had survived such severe wounds had already brought him great joy. When Linghu Chong pretended to fall and stabbed himself in the leg, he knew very well that it was an act, but he also knew too well that Linghu Chong had always been crafty since he was only a child, so he decided not to investigate further. Besides, Linghu Chong's words to Monk No Commandment were very effective and appropriate, just the way he wanted it, therefore, he chose to set the case of Tian Boguang aside temporarily.

"Where's the booklet?" Yue Buqun stuck out his hand.

Linghu Chong had guessed that Master and little apprentice sister must have come back because the "crime" was discovered and the "criminal" identified, that was why Master came back to Mount Huashan after the book. And that was exactly what he had wished for.

"Sixth apprentice brother has it. Little apprentice sister only did it to save my life. Her intention was all good. Master,



please don't blame her. Without Master's permission, I would never dare to even touch the manuscript, not mentioning reading about any formula or technique off the booklet," Linghu Chong swore.

Yue Buqun's face immediately turned into a smile, kind and pleasant. "You did it right. It's not that I don't want to pass it on to you, but since our school is facing some serious events at the time and I could not spare any moment to give you detailed instructions. If I just let you study by yourself, I am afraid that you might go the wrong way, and that would lead to unpredictable trouble." He paused for a while and then continued, "That Monk No Commandment acted like a lunatic, but he does have brilliant inner energy techniques. Did he dissolve those six unorthodox energy streams inside you? How do you feel right now?"

"I don't feel nauseated any more, and all the burning pain and freezing pain are gone too. But it feels like I've run all my strength out," Linghu Chong answered.

"You have just recovered from severe internal injuries. It's natural that you feel weak. We have to repay Great Master No Commandment for saving your life one day," Yue Buqun said.

"Yes, Master!"

Ever since Yue Buqun came back to Mount Huashan, he worried that they might meet the Peach Valley's Six Fairies again. But so far he had seen no trace of them, which relaxed him a bit. But he still didn't want to stay long.

"Let's meet with Dayou and then go to Mount Songshan together. Chong, do you think you are fit to make a long journey?" he asked.

"Yes, I am. Yes!" Linghu Chong replied with sheer joy.

Soon, the Master and the two apprentices arrived at the little hut next to the "House of Integrity." Yue Lingshan rushed forward with a trot and entered the hut after pushing the door open. Suddenly, she started screaming, her voice filled with terror. Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong both dashed

forward to look inside, and they saw Lu Dayou lying on the floor, motionless.

"Little apprentice sister, don't be frightened, I sealed his acupoints earlier," Linghu Chong explained with a smile.

"You sure scared the wits out of me. Why did you seal his acupoints?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"Since I refused to read the manuscript, for my good, he decided to read the scripts in the manuscript for me to listen," Linghu Chong explained. "I couldn't convince him, so I had to seal his acupoints. How come...?"

Suddenly, Yue Buqun uttered a cry of surprise. He bent down to check on Lu Dayou's breathing and also checked his pulses before speaking in shock, "How come...how come he is dead? Chong, which acupoint did you seal?"

Hearing the sudden news that Lu Dayou was dead, Linghu Chong was scared out of his wits. His body started shaking and he almost fainted. "I...I..." he muttered in a trembling voice as he reached out to touch Lu Dayou's face. The face was chilling cold. Apparently Lu Dayou died a long while back. Tears burst out from his eyes. "Sixth...sixth apprentice brother, are you really gone?" he cried.

"Where's the booklet?" Yue Buqun asked.

Linghu Chong looked with his teary eyes, and in the blur, he didn't see the "Violet Twilight Manuscript" either. "Where's the booklet?" he couldn't help but ask himself. He checked Lu Dayou's pockets in a hurry, but there's no trace of the manuscript. "When I sealed his acupoint, I remember seeing the manuscript turned open on the desk. How come it's not there anymore?"

Yue Lingshan looked all over the room, on the bed, next to the desk, behind the door, and under the chairs, but still, there was no trace of the "Violet Twilight Manuscript" whatsoever.

This manuscript was the ultimate Kung Fu manuscript of the Huashan Sword School. Now when it suddenly disappeared, Yue Buqun was utterly apprehensive. He

examined the corpse of Lu Dayou carefully but found no fatal wound. He examined around the little hut, including the top of the roof, but found no traces left by any outsiders.

"If no outsiders had come, then it couldn't have been the Peach Valley's Six Fairies or the Monk No Commandment who took it," Yue Buqun thought inwardly. He asked Linghu Chong with a stern voice, "Chong, which acupoint did you seal?"

Linghu Chong knelt down in front of his Master. "I was afraid that I did not have much strength with my fingers, that's why I sealed the vital acupoint Tan-Zhong Acupoint. I had no clue...no clue that it would have killed sixth apprentice brother accidentally." He extended his arm and drew the long sword by Lu Dayou's waist quickly, and without hesitation, slashed it toward his own neck.

Yue Buqun flicked his finger, which sent the long sword flying far. "Even if you want to die, you'll have to find the Violet Twilight Manuscript first. Where on earth did you hide the manuscript?"

Linghu Chong felt a chill in his heart. He thought to himself, "Master is actually suspecting that I hid the Violet Twilight Manuscript." He dazed for a moment and then spoke again, "Master, someone must have stolen the manuscript. I will chase it back at all cost and return it to you, Master, not even leaving one page behind."

"If someone makes a copy or memorizes the entire thing, then even if we get the manuscript back, intact, the high level Kung Fu of our Huashan School would no longer be the ultimately unique technique." Yue Buqun's mind was as confused as a tangled skein. After a short pause, he said to Linghu Chong with a gentle tone, "Chong, if you took the manuscript, as long as you give it back, I won't blame you."

Staring at the corpse of Lu Dayou blankly, Linghu Chong said loudly, "Master, I swear with all my heart. If there are people who peeped at the 'Violet Twilight Manuscript,' then I will kill all of them. If there are ten of them, I will kill all ten, and if there are a hundred of them, I will kill all one hundred.

If Master still thinks that it was I who stole it, please kill me now. I have no complaints."

"Get up. You said it wasn't you, then I believe you." Yue Buqun shook his head. "You are very good friends with Dayou, of course you would never kill him intentionally. Then who on earth stole the manuscript?" He stared outside of the window blankly, lost in thought.

"Father, it's all my fault. I...I thought I did a great thing by stealing Father's manuscript. Who would have thought that big apprentice brother would refuse to read it and sixth apprentice brother would lose his life because of it. I...I will find the manuscript back no matter what," Yue Lingshan exclaimed in a sobbing voice.

"Let's look around one more time," Yue Buqun said.

The three searched every bit of space in the small hut this time, but not only didn't they find the manuscript, nor could they find any trace or clue.

"We should not spread the news. I will tell your mother about it, and other than that, don't mention this to anybody else. Let's bury Dayou and then head down the mountain," Yue Buqun said to his daughter.

Looking at the face of Lu Dayou's dead body, Linghu Chong couldn't help feeling sad. He thought to himself, "Among all the apprentice brothers, sixth apprentice brother was the best friend of all. But I was actually the one who killed him by accident. I had never seen that coming at all. Even if I weren't wounded, such a poke wouldn't have gotten him killed. Could it be that because I had the Peach Valley's Six Fairies' unorthodox energy inside me, therefore the strength of the poke was somehow different? Even if that were true, why did the Violet Twilight Manuscript disappear all of a sudden? Alas, I really can't figure this out. Master is suspecting me of stealing the manuscript. It's useless to plead my innocence. I must find out the truth about this no matter what I have to do. By then, I can cut my own throat to apologize to sixth apprentice brother."

Wiping off his tears with his sleeve, Linghu Chong found a hoe and worked on digging a grave to bury Lu Dayou's corpse. Sweat streamed down all over his body as he dug with all his strength while panting heavily. Only with the help of Yue Lingshan by the side, he was able to finish building the grave.

Some time later, the trio arrived at the White-Horse Temple. Seeing that Linghu Chong had escaped death and had come back together, Madam Yue felt unspeakable joy. After Yue Buqun told her on the quiet about Lu Dayou's death and the disappearance of the Violet Twilight Manuscript, Madam Yue shed more tears of grievance. Although it was an important matter that the Violet Twilight Manuscript got lost, in her mind, since her husband had mastered the Kung Fu, it didn't matter if he still had the manuscript or not. But Lu Dayou had been an apprentice in the Huashan Sword School for many years, and he was genuinely a friendly and good fellow, so of course it was very sad to learn about his tragic death. The many apprentices had no clue, so after seeing the gloomy look on Master, Master-Wife, big apprentice brother, and little apprentice sister's faces, none dared to make any loud noise.

Yue Buqun ordered Lau Denuo to hire two wagons, one for Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan, the other for Linghu Chong to rest in, and the group resumed the trip east toward Mount Songshan.

On no particulate day, they arrived at the town of Weilin. It was close to dusk already. There was only one inn in the entire town, and it was already full. Since there were quite a few females in the Huashan group, it was too troublesome to stay overnight at any local residence.

"Let's keep going. We should be able to find lodging in the next town," Yue Buqun told everyone.

But only one mile into the trip, the wagon Madam Yue sat in broke down with a broken axle. Having no other choice, Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan had to travel on foot.

“Master, there’s a monastery in the woods over there. Do you think it would be a good idea if we spend the night there?” Shi Daizi pointed at the northeast and suggested.

“But we have females and they might feel it’s troublesome,” Madam Yue said.

“Daizi, why don’t you go make an inquiry. If the monks in the monastery decline, then we won’t, no pressure for them,” Yue Buqun instructed.

Shi Daizi nodded and then dashed away. Only moments later, he had run back while shouting in a distance, “Master, it’s a discarded monastery. There’s no monk there.”

Everyone was quite glad to hear that. Tao Jun, Ying Luobai, and Shu Qi the bunch of younger apprentices ran over ahead of the rest of the people.

By the time Yue Buqun, Madam Yue, and the rest of the group arrived outside of the monastery, dark clouds had piled up the eastern side of the sky, and only moments later, the entire sky had turned dark.

“It’s very fortunate that there’s a discarded monastery here, or we would have found ourselves in the middle of a storm half way,” Madam Yue said.

They entered the big hall and found a statue of a blue-faced Buddha. The statue depicted a man holding herb grass with a cape made of leaves on his shoulders. It was the Buddha of the Herb, Shen-Nong, who, as legend said, tasted hundreds of herbs, himself, to test their medical effects. All the apprentices, led by Yue Buqun, saluted the Buddha to show their respect. Afterwards, they began to settle down, but before they even opened their bedding rolls, several lightning bolts flashed, and thunder exploded. Before long, pea sized raindrops started pouring down, splashing on the tiles on the roof.

The small monastery had leaks everywhere. Everyone decided to not even open his or her bedding rolls and simply found a dry spot to sit down. Gao Gengming, Liang Fa, and three other female apprentices went to prepare dinner.

"This year's spring season thunders are too early. It's probably going to be a year with poor harvest," Madam Yue said.

Linghu Chong sat in a corner of the hall leaning on the rack of the big bell. Rain streamed down the eave's gutter like a curtain made of water. He stared at it as he thought to himself, "It would be a lot more enjoyable if sixth apprentice brother were still alive and could chat and joke with us." During the journey, he rarely spoke to Yue Lingshan. Especially when he saw her and Lin Pingzhi were together sometimes, he would intentionally avoid them and walk far away. He kept telling himself, "Little apprentice sister stole Violet Twilight Manuscript for me to heal my wounds, fully knowing that Master would reproach her severely. It is obvious that she cared for me very much. I only wish that she would always be happy throughout her life. Since I am determined to commit suicide to apologize to sixth apprentice brother after I find the manuscript, why would I ever provoke her again? Little apprentice sister and apprentice brother Lin are a perfect pair of lovers. I hope she will forget all about me, so after I die, she won't have to shed any tears." Even though he thought so in his head, every time he saw her and Lin Pingzhi walking abreast chatting joyously, he simply couldn't help feeling sorrow and pain in his heart. At the moment, it was raining cats and dogs outside the monastery; he watched Yue Lingshan walking about the hall, helping with preparing the meal. Each time when her eyes met Lin Pingzhi's, both would let a slight smile flash across their faces. The two of them probably thought that nobody would notice it, but not even one of the smiles escaped Linghu Chong's eyes. Each smile would depress Linghu Chong some more. He wanted to turn his head away, but each time when Yue Lingshan walked by, he simply couldn't resist the desire to cast a glance toward her.

After dinner, everyone went to sleep. The rain kept coming down, heavy for a while, then light for another, but

never ended. Linghu Chong had many things on his mind and they kept him from falling asleep. Sounds of breathing and snorting rose one after another. Everyone else had fallen asleep.

Sounds of hoof beats suddenly rose from the southeast. There were over ten of them and they came closer and closer along the main road.

"Why are they traveling in such a hurry in the middle of the rainy night? Could it possibly be that they are after us?" Linghu Chong's heart skipped a beat. He sat up and then heard Yue Buqun speak to everyone in a loud voice.

"Everyone stay quiet."

Moments later, the pack of horsemen cruised by the monastery. By then everyone of Huashan Sword School were awake and each had his hand next to his sword handle. Hearing that the sound of hoof beats passed by the monastery and went further and further, all let out a breath of relief and were just about ready to go back to sleep, when the sound of the hoof beats rose again. Apparently these riders had turned around and came back. All the horses stopped right outside of the monastery.

"Is Mr. Yue from the Huashan Sword School inside the monastery? We have a question to ask him," a voice shouted, loud and clear.

Linghu Chong was the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, and it had always been him who stepped forward to handle things. So he walked to the entrance of the monastery, took off the door bolt, and then opened the gate.

"Friends, who are you? Why have you come late at night?" he asked as he looked outside.

There were a total of fifteen riders. They formed an arch and surrounded the gate. About six or seven of them had waterproof lanterns in their hands, and they all pointed their lanterns at Linghu Chong's face.

In the dark night, when six or seven lanterns all pointed at one's face, then inevitably, one would end up with blurry



eyes. Just this one action had shown that the uninvited visitors were full of hostility. Linghu Chong opened his eyes as wide as he could but only found out that each of the fifteen riders had a black hood over his head, leaving only two holes showing his eyes. Linghu Chong suddenly realized, "Either we know these people, or they are afraid that we would remember their faces."

"Please have Yue Buqun, Mr. Yue, come out to see us," a rider on the left said.

"Who are you? May I have the honor to learn your name please, so I can pass it on to my Master?" Linghu Chong inquired.

"You can save yourself some trouble by stop asking for our names. You can go tell your Master this: We heard that the Huashan Sword School got hold of the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, so we just wanted to borrow it to take a look," the man responded.

Linghu Chong felt his anger starting to grow. "The Huashan Sword School has its own set of Kung Fu techniques. Why would we want other's Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript? We don't have it. Even if we did have it, are you just going to take it with force? How dare you belittle the Huashan Sword School?"

The man burst into loud laughter. The rest of the fourteen riders also began to laugh out loud. The sound of their deafening laughter swept across the deserted plain like a storm. Obviously each and every one of them had first-class inner strength.

"We've encountered tough enemy again," shocked inwardly, Linghu Chong thought to himself. "It seemed that all fifteen of them are elite fighters. I wonder who they really are."

Amid the loud laughter, a man spoke, "We heard that the chap Lin from the Fortune Prestige Escort House has joined the Huashan Sword School. We've always heard that Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue of the Huashan Sword School had

superb mastery of sword arts. Then of course he would feel beneath his dignity to pay any attention to it. We are just a bunch of nobodies in the Martial World. Today we make bold to ask Mr. Yue to grant his permission and loan the book so we can have a look.”

The fourteen others’ laughter kept going like tides after tides, but this speaker’s voice still sounded loud and clear, standing out clearly from all the other noises. Apparently, this one’s inner strength was even stronger compared to the others.

“Who are you, really? You....” Linghu Chong said. But he couldn’t even hear his own words. Astounded, he stopped talking and thought to himself, “Could I have lost all my inner energy built up during the past over a dozen years? Can there have not a single bit of it left?”

After Linghu Chong left Mount Huashan, he had tried several times to work on his Qi-Gong exercises using the formula and techniques from his own school, but as soon as he started to gather his inner strength, his breathing would lose its rhythm and various uncontrollable energy would start flowing randomly through his body. And as soon as he tried to direct the flow, nausea and dizziness would follow. It would turn so bad that if he didn’t stop the breathing exercise, he would have simply passed out. He tried several times more and always ended up with the same result. When he asked for advice from his Master about it, Yue Buqun only cast a cold glance at him and didn’t answer. At the time Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Master must have suspected that I embezzled the Violet Twilight Manuscript and was practicing the techniques behind his back. There really is no need to plead innocence. After all, I won’t be alive for long; why should I trouble myself with these inner strength problems?” After that incident, he stopped exercising completely. Who would have thought that when he tried to gather his strength and speak loudly, his voice would be completely buried by the enemy’s laughter?

Yue Buqun's voice rose from inside the monastery, loud and clear, "All of you are renowned masters in the Martial World. Why have you been so modest and called yourself a bunch of nobodies? Yue Buqun never tells a lie. We really don't have the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript of the Lin Family."

He used the Divine Art of the Violet Twilight when he spoke. Although his voice was mixed with the loud laughter from all the people outside of the monastery, everyone, both inside the monastery and outside of the monastery, could hear every word loud and clear. He had spoken in a very relaxed manner, no different from any ordinary conversation. It sounded a lot more natural than the way the previous man had spoke - yelling with immense strength.

"You say you don't have it. Then where the hell is it?" Another man retorted in a croaky voice.

"What makes you think that you are worthy of the answer?" Yue Buqun mocked.

"Anyone in this world is worthy of an answer for things happening in this world," the man replied.

Yue Buqun sneered, but did not respond.

"Hey, Yue Buqun, are you going to give it up or not? Don't you refuse a toast only to drink a forfeit! If you don't give it up yourself, we'll have no choice but to resort to force and go in to search ourselves," that man yelled out loud.

"All female apprentices stay together, back to back, and all male apprentices, unsheathe your swords!" Madam Yue told everyone in a whisper.

Rustling sounds echoed as everyone inside the monastery drew their long swords. Linghu Chong stood by the gate and reached for his long sword, but before he had enough time to draw his sword, two men had leapt off their horses and sprang at him. Linghu Chong dodged to the side and was just about to draw his sword when he heard someone yell, "Get lost!" Then the man raised his leg and kicked Linghu Chong hard, sending him flying in the air.

Linghu Chong flew tens of feet before landing hard in a bush. He found himself in a state of complete confusion.

“His kick wasn’t all that powerful, how come I don’t have any strength with my lower body and my legs feel so light?” he thought.

He struggled to sit up, but all of a sudden, he felt as if the blood between his stomach and his chest were boiling hot while seven or eight streams of energy circled and twisted inside him, clashing and smashing against each other. He couldn’t even move a little finger of his. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. He opened his mouth wide to scream, but nothing came out of it. It was almost as if he was under some kind of evil spell. His brain still worked perfectly, but he had become completely frozen, not able to move a single muscle. Sound of weapons clashing into each other echoed in his ears nonstop. Master, Master-Wife, and second apprentice brother dashed out of the monastery and engaged in fights with seven or eight masked enemies. Several other masked men charged into the monastery. Shouts and yells came out through the gate mixed with girls’ rebukes. The rain started to get heavier. Several waterproof lanterns were scattered around on the ground. The dim yellowish light flickered as reflections from blades flashed and shadows in all shapes swayed back and forth.

A short while passed when suddenly, a shriek from a female echoed inside the monastery. Linghu Chong became more worried. The enemy consisted of all men. Then of course the shriek must have been coming from an injured apprentice sister. He watched the fights outside of the monastery. Master was busy waving his sword fighting against four enemies. Master-Wife was also engaged in a fight with two enemies. He knew that both his Master and Master-Wife had brilliant sword skills. Even though they were both fighting against more than one opponent, chances were that they would still be able to hold them off. Yelling at the top of his tongue, second apprentice brother Lao Denuo was

also fighting against two opponents. Both opponents used long knives. From the weapon colliding sounds Linghu Chong could tell that both of them had very strong arms. He knew that if the fight lasted longer, Lao Denuo would eventually have no chance of withstanding their powerful attacks. Seeing how fierce the fights outside of the monastery were with three on his side against eight enemies, he could easily imagine how vicious the fights would be inside. There were a good number of apprentice brothers and sisters inside the monastery, but none of them were elite fighters. Screams and cries rose one after another. Perhaps several people had been slain. The more worried he became, the harder it was to gather any strength. He could only pray inwardly.

“Dear Heaven! Please let me gain my strength back for just one hour. If I can get back in the monastery, I will be able to protect the little apprentice sister. Even if the enemy slice me into ten thousand pieces or bestow upon me every kind of torturing, I would be most willing to.”

He struggled some more and tried to work up his inner energy, but suddenly six streams of energy flow lashed at his chest all together, and then two streams of energy flow smashed down from above and pushed the six streams of energy back down. Linghu Chong felt ultimate emptiness as if all of his organs had disappeared and all his blood and skin were also completely gone. A shiver ran through his heart as he cried inwardly, “Good Heavens! So that’s how it is!”

By then he finally understood. When the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies tried to heal his wounds using their inner energy, they forced six streams of inner energy into his body through different channels and passages. That didn’t do his internal wounds any good, and in addition, the six energy streams stayed inside him and caused even more problems. Then it just happened that he met Monk No Commandment with excellent inner strength, but also an utterly impetuous temper, that forced another two streams of energy flow inside of him and overwhelmed the six streams of energy

from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. For a short while, it looked as if his internal wounds were all healed, but the truth was that he had two more energy streams in his body, which created a resistance against the existing energy streams inside of him, and his own inner energy from years of Qi-Gong exercises had all perished as an end result. He had been rendered into an ordinary person who had never been trained with any martial arts.

A pain came from his heart as he thought to himself, "What a misfortune! This is as if all my martial art skills were taken away from me. At the moment when my school is in trouble, I couldn't even help it in anyway. I am the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, yet all I can do is to lie here on the ground and watch my Master and Master-Wife getting harassed and my apprentice brothers and sisters getting slaughtered. What a big loser am I! Fine, I'll just go die by little apprentice sister's side."

He knew that if he even attempted to gather some inner energy, which would trigger the eight streams of energy inside him, he would end up frozen like a dead meat, so he let all inner strength flow back into his central stomach naturally and didn't try to gather any inner strength, and sure enough, he gained control of his four limbs. He stood up slowly, drew his sword in slow motion, and then moved toward the monastery in small steps.

As soon as he entered the gate, a smell of blood immediately assailed him. Two lanterns sat on the altar and lit the hall. Liang Fa, Shi Daizi, Gao Gengming, and a bunch of other apprentice brothers were still fighting a bloody battle. Several apprentice brothers and sister lay on the ground. It was hard to tell if they were still breathing. Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi were in the middle of a battle abreast against a masked enemy.

Yue Lingshan's long hair scattered about, and Lin Pingzhi was holding his sword in his left hand; obviously his right hand got injured in the battle. The masked man had a short

spear in his hand and demonstrated excellent skills with his spear techniques. Lin Pingzhi had to use the move called Green Pines Welcoming Guests three times in a row to parry off his fierce attacks. But the sword moves he had learned were too limited. The masked man gave his short spear a sudden shake. The red tassels on the spear spread open and blinded Lin Pingzhi's view. With a thump, the spear stabbed into Lin Pingzhi's right shoulder. Yue Lingshan launched two thrusts frantically and forced the enemy to take a step back.

"Little Lin, go wrap up your wound. Hurry!" she shouted.

"It's no problem!" Lin Pingzhi responded as he lunged with a thrust, but his feet were already tumbling underneath him.

The masked man let out a long laugh when he swung the spear and struck Yue Lingshan in the waist with the spear handle. Yue Lingshan dropped the sword in her right hand and squatted down in pain.

Linghu Chong was shocked. He dashed forward and thrust his sword forward. But the sword only went forward for about one foot before all the energy streams inside him clashed again. Instantly, his right arm gave out and dropped down. The masked man saw the sword coming toward him and had planned to dodge to the side and then return the attack with his spear, but after only one foot into the thrust, the attacker's arm had dropped down. He was a bit confused. Without thinking much, he swept his left leg and kicked Linghu Chong all the way out of the gate. "Splash!" Linghu Chong fell into a puddle of water outside of the monastery. The rain was still pouring down nonstop. Linghu Chong found himself unable to move with mud inside his mouth, eyes, nose, and ears.

Lao Denuo was just taken down, with his acupoints sealed by the enemy. His two opponents now joined the other six to attack the Yue couple. Moments later, another two enemies ran out of the monastery and joined the group. Yue Buqun was now against seven and Madam Yue against three.

Suddenly, both Madam Yue and one of her opponents cried out. Both had inflicted wounds on their legs. The injured man retreated back. Madam Yue had one less opponent now. But since she had just taken a heavy chop on the leg, with such a severe wound, her strength began to fade away. After exchanging some more blows, she took a hit on the shoulder from the back of the enemy's knife. That was it. She collapsed to the ground. The two masked men burst into loud laughter as they sealed several acupoints on Madam Yue's back.

By then, the apprentices inside the monastery had all been wounded and taken down one after another. The enemies obviously had a plot. They only knocked the Huashan apprentices down or sealed their acupoints but didn't kill any one of them. The fifteen masked men surrounded Yue Buqun in a circle. Eight of them took on eight different directions to attack Yue Buqun simultaneously, and the remaining seven each held a waterproof lantern and aimed the light directly at Yue Buqun's eyes.

The Head Master of the Huashan Sword School had superb inner strength and brilliant sword skills, but the eight attackers were all elite fighters as well. In addition, the seven lanterns pointing directly at him made it very hard for him to look straight ahead. Yue Buqun knew too well that the Huashan Sword School had suffered a crushing defeat, and the entire body of the school would inevitably perish in the monastery, but he still put on a good defense by blocking all his vital parts with a shield of blade. He had resourceful inner energy and effective sword art techniques. When the lanterns were directed at him, he simply looked down. For a good while, the eight attackers made no progress whatsoever.

"Yue Buqun, are you going to surrender or not?" one of the masked men yelled at him.

"I would rather die than submit. Kill me if you want," Yue Buqun replied.



“If you don’t surrender, I’ll cut off your wife’s right arm to start with!” the man threatened. He raised his large saber high and aimed it at Madam Yue’s shoulder. The saber had a very thick back and a razor sharp blade. Reflecting the light from the lanterns, the blade shined with dark bluish flare.

“How can I just let him cut off junior apprentice sister’s arm?” Yue Buqun hesitated. But then he thought, “If I threw down my sword and surrender, undoubtedly I would suffer humiliation all the same. How can I let the hundreds of years of eminence of the Huashan Sword School get ruined in my hands?”

He took a deep breath, and suddenly his face shined in violet color as he swung his sword at the man on his left. The man raised his knife to parry it, but Yue Buqun had attached his Divine Art of the Violet Twilight with the chop; the sword carried a tremendous amount of power. The knife was knocked back. Both the sword and the knife cut into the man’s right arm simultaneously and chopped two sections off his right arm. Blood splashed everywhere. The man uttered a loud cry and fell to the ground.

Succeeding with the first move Yue Buqun thrust his sword down swiftly. This time the sword penetrated another enemy’s left leg. That man poured out a stream of curses and retreated.

Now there were two less opponents in the battle, but the situation wasn’t any better. A heavy thump broke out as a meteor hammer smashed into Yue Buqun’s back. He had to lunge three quick thrusts to drive the enemies back. Barely catching his breath, he couldn’t help but spit out a mouthful of blood. All the enemies cheered.

“Old folk Yue is wounded. Wear him out!”

The six attackers could almost smell their victory, so they all took a step back and made the circle a bit bigger. Now Yue Buqun didn’t have any chance of a surprise attack.

There are a total of fifteen masked enemies, three of which had been wounded by the Yue couple. Among the

three wounded, one had a serious injury – his arm was cut off. The other two only had injuries on their legs, nothing too serious, and each held a waterproof lantern and kept swearing at Yue Buqun wildly.

From their accents, Yue Buqun could tell that they came from different regions. The Kung Fu skills they demonstrated also consisted of many different styles. Obviously they weren't apprentices from the same school. But during the fight, they had good understanding of each other and attacked with precision and synchronization. It didn't seem that they had just ganged up together recently. Where on earth were they from? He pondered but couldn't find an answer. And the most unusual part of this whole thing was that since all fifteen of them had elite fighting skills, as one with a good deal of knowledge of the Martial World, he shouldn't have failed to recognize at least some of them, yet he had no clue whatsoever. He was sure that none of these enemies had ever engaged in a fight with him before or had grudges against him. Could it be true that they came to give trouble to the Huashan Sword School because they were really after the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript?

He pondered and pondered, yet never slowing down with his hands. He used the Divine Art of the Violet Twilight to its extreme, and the tip of his sword shined dimly. After exchanging over another dozen moves, another enemy got stabbed in the shoulder and had to drop his iron staff. One of the enemies standing outside of the attacking circle sprang forward and took over the attacking position. This man held a knife with a saw shaped blade. The knife looked very heavy, and close to the tip of the knife, the blade curved into the shape of a hook. The man tried again and again to lock Yue's sword with the hook. But Yue Buqun had plenty of inner strength. It seemed as if the longer the fight lasted, the more energetic he appeared to be. Suddenly he struck a back palm, which landed squarely on one enemy's chest and broke the man's two ribs. The steel cane in the man's hands was

also knocked down by the shock. But the man turned out to be extremely ferocious. The great pain from his broken ribs provoked his fury. He dived down and had Yue Buqun's left leg in his arms. Astounded, Yue Buqun swung his sword and chopped down at the man's back, but two knives reached forward simultaneously and blocked the chop. Not able to chop down using his long sword, Yue Buqun kicked toward the enemy's head with his right foot. That man was an expert in grappling. Reaching out with his right arm, he hooked Yue Buqun's right leg as well. Then he rolled forward. Although Yue Buqun had excellent Kung Fu skills, he could no longer keep his balance and fell down on the ground. Instantly, knife, short spear, meteor hammer, long sword, and other various weapons all aimed right at his vital parts such as head, face, throat, and chest. Yue Buqun heaved a deep sigh and let go of his sword. Closing his eyes in despair, he waited for the deathblow. Then he felt some heavy blows to his waist, rib cage, throat, and chest. The enemy had sealed several of his acupoints with heavy jabs.

Two masked men propped him up as an old voice spoke out, "Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue certainly has brilliant Kung Fu skills. You have a well-deserved reputation. We ganged up on you, fifteen against one, yet were only able to subdue you after getting four or five of us wounded. Hmm, that is very admirable! If I had to fight you one on one, I am sure I would lose to you. But when you look at it a different way, we have fifteen, but you have over twenty people. Your Huashan Sword School still has more bodies and better odds here. Tonight we won the battle with few against many and completely defeated the Huashan Sword School. I have to say that the victory didn't come easy. What do you guys think?"

"Most definitely! It wasn't an easy victory for sure!" The rest of the masked men agreed in unison.

"Mr. Yue," the old man continued, "we really have no grudge against you. We made bold and offended you only

because we want to borrow the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript and check it out. This manuscript didn't belong to your Huashan Sword School before. When you used all your ingenuity and managed to take in Lin Family's young boy from the Fortune Prestige Escort House as your apprentice, it was obvious that you were really after that sword manuscript. What you did is truly sneaky. When fellow martial friends heard about this, all were quite mad at you. I am giving you a valuable advice here. Why don't you give it up?"

Yue Buqun was infuriated. "Humph, I am already in your hands. Go ahead and give me a quick end. Why waste your time with rubbish? Everyone in the Martial World knows my reputation. You can easily kill me, but if you want to ruin my reputation, humph! Dream on!"

"What's so difficult about ruining your reputation?" a man in a mask said with loud laughter. "Your wife, daughter, and those female apprentices do not look bad at all. Why don't we divide them up and make them our bitches? Ha-ha, Mr. Yue, you are going to be very famous in the Martial World indeed!"

The rest of the masked men all laughed out loud. The laughter was filled with evil. Yue Buqun trembled with rage.

Several men in mask pushed the bunch of male and female apprentices out of the monastery. All of them had their acupoints sealed. Some had blood all over their faces and some fell down immediately after they came out - obviously they had wounds on their legs or feet.

"Mr. Yue," the old man with a mask spoke again, "you probably have somewhat figured out where we are from. We are no heroes from the righteous schools. There is really no restriction limiting what we can do or cannot do. Some of my buddies here are really fond of women. I am sure it wouldn't look too good for you if some of them offended your respectful wife and daughter."

"Fine! Fine! If you don't believe me, go ahead and search us. See for yourself whether we have the Evil-Resisting Sword

Manuscript or not," Yue Buqun croaked.

"I'd suggest you give it out yourself. Once we start searching one by one and get to your woman and your daughter, it's not going to be a pleasant scene," a man behind a mask said with an evil grin.

"All the trouble started because of me, Lin Pingzhi," Lin Pingzhi barked. "Listen up! Our Lin Family in Fujian didn't have any Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript at all! It's up to you to believe it or not." He picked up a steel cane from the ground and smacked it toward his own forehead. But since his acupoints on his arms were sealed, the smack was so weak that even though the cane hit his head, it only left a scratch on his skin with no blood coming out of it. But everyone understood his intention. He had intended to sacrifice his own life to prove that there wasn't any sword manuscript that the Huashan Sword School ever got hold of.

"Young Master Lin, you are quite heroic." The old man with a mask grinned. "We are friends of your deceased father. Yue Buqun murdered your father and took possession of your family's Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript, that's why we are here to defend the victim against injustice. Your Master has a mere name of a gentleman, but not the reality of a gentleman. I think it would be better if you submit to me as your Master. I guarantee you that you will learn first-class Kung Fu that will enable you to sweep about in the Martial World at will."

"My parents were murdered by Yu Canghai from the Qingcheng Sword School and Mu Gaofeng. What does it have anything to do with my Master? I am a proud apprentice of the Huashan Sword School. Did you expect me to incline to life instead of braving death in dangers like this?" Lin Pingzhi snarled.

"That's right! Our Huashan Sword School...." Liang Fa also snarled.

"What about your Huashan Sword School?" a masked man yelled as he swung his knife forward and chopped Liang

Fa's head off. Blood gushed out like a fountain. Several Huashan apprentices screamed in terror.

Many thoughts tangled in Yue Buqun's mind, but he still couldn't figure out where these men had come from. According to what the old man had just said, perhaps they were bandits from the unorthodox side. Or maybe they were key figures of an evil clan. However, even if he didn't know some of the renowned masters in the region, either on the orthodox side or the unorthodox side, he would have at least heard about them. There was no clan or gang that had so many elite fighters. That man chopped off Liang Fa's head with no hesitation. The cruelty he put on display was exceptionally rare. When people engage in fights in the Martial World, it was usual that people got hurt or killed. But once one side took the other side prisoner, it was very seldom that one would cut someone's head off so carelessly.

After killing Liang Fa with a casual chop, the man laughed wildly and walked next to Madam Yue. He chopped the bloodstained knife a couple of times in the air. The blade swished by Madam Yue's head with a mere half foot.

"Don't...don't hurt my mother!" Yue Lingshan screamed before losing her consciousness.

Madam Yue was a brave woman and showed no fear. She actually wished that the man would kill her with a chop, thus avoiding any possible humiliation from them. So she snarled at him, "You damn coward. Go ahead and kill me if you've got any guts."

Sound of hoof beats suddenly rose from the northeast corner. Dozens of horses galloped in their direction.

"Who are they? Go check them out?" the old man in the mask yelled.

"Got it!" two men in masks responded as they jumped on their horsebacks and dashed out

The sound of hoof beats came closer and closer, and then came the sounds of weapons clashing into each other. "Ouch!" someone cried out. Apparently the two masked men

had gotten into a battle with the people coming and someone just got wounded.

The Yue Buqun couple and all the Huashan apprentices were overwhelmed in joy, knowing that the cavalry had arrived. In the dim light from the lanterns, they watched the forty or so riders gallop along the main road. Mud splashed high as the group approached them. Moments later, the riders arrived and reined in their horses outside the monastery. A man on horseback shouted.

“Oh, these are friends from the Huashan Sword School. Hey, isn’t that brother Yue?”

Yue Buqun looked following the origin of the voice. When his eyes stopped at the man’s face, he felt greatly embarrassed. The man was none other than the one who took the Five Mountains Command Flag up to Mount Huashan only several days ago, the Third Guardian of Songshan – Crane Hands Lu Bai. The man on his right was tall and chubby. Yue Buqun recognized him: he was the Second Guardian of Songshan – Tower Holding Palm Ding Mian. And the one on his left turned out to be the expelled Sword-Branch apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, Feng Buping. Many of the Taishan and Hengshan masters who had visited Mount Huashan several days ago were also among them only that this time there were even more people than the last time. Under the faint light from the waterproof lanterns, shadows loomed, and in the short time, Yue Buqun had a hard time making out the rest of the people.

“Brother Yue,” Lu Bai said, “you didn’t accept the Command Flag from Chief Zuo the other day, and Chief Zuo was a bit upset. That’s why he sent apprentice brother Ding and Tang together with me to visit Mount Huashan again with the Command Flag. We had no idea that we would meet you here late at night? What a surprise!”

Yue Buqun kept his silence and did not reply.

“So it is Hero Ding, Hero Lu, and Hero Tang from the Songshan Sword School. What an honor to meet you!” the

old man in the mask said, cupping his hands.

“You flatter me. May I have the honor to hear your name? Why don’t you want to reveal your true identity?” The Seventh Guardian of Songshan, Tang Ying-E, asked.

“We are just a bunch of nobodies in the heterodox side,” the old man in the mask replied. “If we speak out our ugly bandit nicknames, it would only be an insult to all you great masters’ ears. Well, for the sake of you guys, we dare not show disrespect to Madam Yue and Miss Yue any more. But there is this one thing we’d like you to help uphold justice.”

“What is the matter? Why don’t you tell us about it?” Tang Ying-E suggested.

“Well, this Mister Yue Buqun here has a nickname called Gentleman Sword. We heard that he always talks about humanity, justice and virtues, and always abide by the rules of the Martial World. But what he has done recently seemed way off track. You must have heard that the Fortune Prestige Escort House in Fuzhou was wiped out and the Chief Master Lin Zhennan couple was murdered.”

“Yes. I heard that the Qingcheng Sword School in Szechwan did that,” Tang Ying-E responded.

The old man shook his head again and again. “That sure was the story floating around in the Martial World, but it wasn’t the truth. Let’s get to the bottom of this. Everyone knows that the Lin Family of the Fortune Prestige Escort House has the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript passed down from their ancestors, in which brilliant and profound sword art techniques were recorded. Once one masters the sword art, he would have no match in the entire world. The reason that the Lin Zhennan couple got murdered was because someone coveted the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.”

“What about that?” Tang Ying-E asked.

“How exactly were the Lin Zhennan couple murdered and who did it? Outsiders wouldn’t have a clue on that. We heard that this Gentleman Sword secretly plotted some cunning schemes and fooled Lin Zhennan’s son into becoming a dead



set apprentice of the Huashan Sword School. You see what I am saying? The sword manuscript of course was brought into the Huashan Sword School naturally. We thought about it and came to the conclusion that Yue Buqun was adept at scheming. He couldn't get it by force, so he tried to get it by trickery. Think about it. How much experience can a young chap Lin have? After he joined the Huashan Sword School, for sure the old fox would play him like a dummy and have him present the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript to his Master of his own will."

"But I am afraid that this is unlikely. The Huashan Sword School has brilliant sword art techniques of its own, and Mr. Yue's Divine Art of the Violet Twilight is also a powerful and unique Kung Fu in the Martial World - one of the best Qi-Gong techniques as a matter of fact. Why would he lust for sword art techniques in other style?" Tang Ying-E commented.

The old man smirked. "Hero Tang, you really are gauging the heart of a rascal with your own decent measures. What kind of brilliant sword art does Yue Buqun have? After the Sword-Branch and the Qi-Branch of the Huashan Sword School broke up, the Qi-Branch seized control of Mount Huashan. They only emphasized on working with their inner energy. Their sword skills are so ordinary and naïve. People in the Martial World respected the reputation of the Huashan Sword School and mistakenly thought that they actually have some true skills. But the truth is...a-ha, ha-ha...."

He paused for a second with a sneer, and then continued. "Logically speaking, since Yue Buqun is the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, his mastery of sword skills shouldn't have been ordinary. But you have all seen with your own eyes that he was taken prisoner by us, a bunch of no names. We used neither poison, nor projectiles, and we didn't have overwhelming numbers. We relied on our true skills to take care of the Huashan Sword School masters and apprentices. We won the battle the hard way fair and square.

From that you probably can figure out yourself how good their Kung Fu skills are. But of course Yue Buqun knew his own limitation. That's why he wants to get hold of the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript quickly so he could study the great sword arts and not make a fool out of himself in critical moments, so he wouldn't be carrying a fame that's untrue."

"Your words are certainly convincing." Tang Ying-E nodded.

"We are just a group of nobodies. In the eyes of great masters like you, our level of Kung Fu skills isn't even worth a laugh. We dare not hanker after for the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript. However, for the last ten years or so, thanks to Chief Master Lin of the Fortune Prestige Escort House who actually thought we were worth of something and kept sending us precious gifts. So when his escort wagons passed by our territory, none of us would touch it for the sake of good relationship. Recently, when we heard that Chief Master Lin ended up dead and his family ruined all because of that sword art manuscript, we couldn't help but feel very irritated. It has really aroused public indignation. That's why've decided to make Yue Buqun pay for this."

He paused for a moment and cast a glance at the group still on horsebacks before continuing, "All of you here, who have just arrived, are renowned heroes and masters in the Martial World. And among you, there are also reputable senior masters from the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, to which the Huashan Sword School belongs as a member school. We here resort to your judgment on this matter, and whatever you decide, we will comply."

"Brother, that's very kind of you. We really appreciate it. Apprentice brother Ding and Lu, what do you think we should do?" Tang Ying-E asked.

"Chief Zuo has said before, that the Head Master post of the Huashan Sword School should have belonged to Master Feng. Since Yue Buqun committed such despicable and

brazen act today, we should just let Master Feng purify the Huashan Sword School, himself!" Ding Mian replied.

Everyone on horsebacks agreed in unison, "Hero Ding has judged it so fair and clear. This is the internal affair of the Huashan Sword School, so naturally the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School himself should handle it. It would also save us from being accused of poking our noses into other people's business by fellow martial friends."

Feng Buping dismounted from his horse and bowed to everyone.

"I am very grateful for the due respect you have shown here. Ever since Yue Buqun usurped the Head Master post of our school, cries of discontent rise all the way up to heaven, and the reputation of our school had reached its ultimate low. And now he has sunk so low to commit the many wild things: killing one's father, seizing his sword art manuscript, and coercing him into becoming an apprentice. I am a man with no great virtue or abilities, and would have never been worth of the Huashan Sword School Head Master post, but I value the hardship the many past masters of the Huashan Sword School had to go through in order to uphold the reputation of our school, and I simply can not bear to watch our Huashan Sword School reduced to rubble in the hands of Yue Buqun, the unworthy apprentice. That's why I will have to undertake to do the difficult job as best as I can. Friends, will you please keep offering me advice and supervision as time goes on?" He bowed again.

The rain had not fully stopped and had turned into a light shower by then. Seven or eight of the riders had lit their torches. The fire from the torches shined upon Feng Buping's face, which looked immensely contented.

"Yue Buqun is guilty of the most heinous crimes, which are too severe for any clemency," Feng Buping went on. "We must follow the school rules and execute him on sight! Apprentice brother Cong, go ahead and execute the traitors, the Yue Buqun couple, to purify our Huashan Sword School."

"Got it!" a man in his fifties responded as he drew his blade and walked by Yue Buqun. "Yue Buqun, you corrupted our school; today is your judgment day!" He grinned hideously.

Yue Buqun heaved a deep sigh. "I see! Your Sword-Branch plotted this entire deadly trap so you can take over the Head Master post. Cong Buqi, if you kill me today, when your time comes, how are you going to face the many past masters of our Huashan Sword School in the underworld?"

"He who commits much wickedness brings death upon himself. You have committed so many crimes. Even if I don't kill you, someone else will. But that wouldn't be satisfactory at all, would it?" Cong Buqi smirked.

"Save your breath, apprentice brother Cong. Start the execution." Feng Buping yelled.

"Yes," Cong Buqi replied. He raised his long sword high and then retracted his elbow, getting ready for the deathblow. The blazing fire from the torches illuminated onto the naked blade of the sword and painted it red and green.

"Hold it!" Madam Yue suddenly shouted out. "Where is the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript then? To accuse one of stealing, at least you have to show the stolen goods as evidence. Do you think you can just convince everyone by making slanderous accusations?"

"That's right!" Cong Buqi replied. He took several steps toward Madam Yue with a wicked grin. "That Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript is most likely hidden on you. I'd better do a body search so you won't accuse us of making slanderous accusations." He reached his left hand out toward Madam Yue's bosom.

Madam Yue had been wounded in the legs and two of her acupoints were also sealed. She watched Cong Buqi's big ugly hand reaching toward her, yet couldn't move an inch. It would be a horrendous disgrace for her if his finger touched her skin. In tremendous despair, she shouted out loud, "Apprentice brother Ding from Songshan Sword School!"

“What?” Ding Mian asked, not expecting a call from Madam Yue at all.

“Your apprentice brother Chief Zuo is the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and sets a good example for everyone in the Martial World. Our Huashan Sword School also relies upon his leadership. How would you explain to him if you let this blatant scoundrel disgrace a woman?” Madam Yue challenged.

“Well....” Ding Mian pondered and did not answer.

“That crook was telling a bold lie when he said that they didn’t win with overwhelming numbers,” Madam Yue said. “And as regards to these two traitors of the Huashan Sword School, if any one of them can defeat my husband on his own in a fair fight, we will give up the post of Head Master with all respects and no complaints. Otherwise, you will never get the recognition from the thousands of fellow martial people.”

At the last word, she spat at Cong Buqi’s face, all of a sudden. Since Cong Buqi was right next to her, and Madam Yue’s action took him by a complete surprise, he couldn’t move out of the way in time. The spit hit him right between his eyes.

“Damn you!” Cong Buqi cursed angrily.

“Listen up, you traitors! Your Sword-Branch only has low-grade Kung Fu. It doesn’t require my husband. Even I, a woman, can kill you as easy as flipping my hand if I hadn’t fallen a prey of a plot and had my acupoints sealed!” Madam Yue mocked furiously.

“Fine!” Ding Mian made his decision. He gave his black horse a light spur. The horse walked forward and circled behind Madam Yue. Turning his horsewhip around, he bent down slightly and poked it out. The shaft of the whip jabbed at three different acupoints on Madam Yue’s back. A shock ran through Madam Yue’s body as the two sealed acupoints were released.

As soon as Madam Yue gained control of her limbs again, she knew that Ding Mian intended to let her have a duel with

Cong Buqi. The result of the duel would not only make a difference between life and death for the Yue family of three, it would also decide the ultimate fate of the entire Huashan School. If she could defeat Cong Buqi, it probably wouldn't turn danger into safety, but at least it would be a turn for the better. If she lost the duel, then there would be no hope. She grabbed her long sword, which was knocked down earlier, off the ground, and held it across her chest in a stance. But her left leg suddenly gave out on her. She almost had to kneel down on her knees. The wounds on her legs were too severe, and as soon as she tried to use her legs, she found that they lacked enough strength to support her.

"You said you are only a woman. And now you are pretending to have injuries with your legs. Why are we having this sword contest at all? There's no glory in beating you!" Cong Buqi burst into loud laughter.

Madam Yue wanted no more words from him. "Here it comes!" she yelled and shot out three thrusts in tremendous speed. She had attached her inner strength to the blade. The sword whistled as it stabbed forward. Out of the three thrusts, each thrust went faster than the previous one and all were aimed at her opponent's vital parts.

"Nice!" Cong Buqi yelled as he took two steps back.

Normally, Madam Yue would have charged forward immediately following the attack, but she was afraid to take any risks with her weak legs and stood still instead.

Cong Buqi stepped forward again and started his own attack. Three loud rings echoed as flickers scattered in all directions. Those were three vicious thrusts, indeed. Madam Yue parried them one by one and immediately turned the third block into an attacking stance and stabbed at the enemy's lower abdomen.

Yue Buqun stood by the side and watched his wife fighting the tough opponent with wounded legs. Cong Buqi's sword techniques appeared to be delicate and exquisite. Compared to Madam Yue's techniques, they had way more

clever variations. After exchanging ten moves or so, Madam Yue started to lose the agility and speed with her sword moves in her lower body. The Qi-Branch of the Huashan Sword School was good at overcoming the enemy with resourceful inner energy, but since Madam Yue had a hard time controlling her breathing after the injuries, her sword moves gradually lost the initiatives and became restricted by Cong Buqi's moves. Yue Buqun was greatly worried, and he became even more concerned when he saw his wife accelerate her techniques.

"The Sword-Branch is better with their sword techniques, yet you are countering his sword techniques with your own. Countering the enemy's strong points with one's shortcomings would only lead to a defeat," he thought to himself.

Madam Yue also knew the fundamental ideas here within, but because the wounds on her legs were too severe, and in addition, her acupoints were sealed right after she inflicted the wounds, she was never able to tend the wounds; even now the wounds were still bleeding, how could she have gathered her inner energy to counter the attacks? At the moment, it was only her determination that had kept her going, and although her sword moves never slowed down, the strength in each move had started to decrease quickly. After another ten moves or so, Cong Buqi had detected Madam Yue's weak point. While feeling much delighted, he was in no rush for a quick win, and made sure he was putting up a good defense.

Linghu Chong was also watching the fight. Seeing that Cong Buqi's moves all focused on techniques, not strengths, completely different from what his Master had taught him, he thought to himself, "No wonder our school was divided into the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch. The two branches' Kung Fu styles are indeed opposite of each other."

He slowly struggled to get back on his feet. Reaching out around him, he found a long sword on the ground. "Our

school has really suffered a crushing defeat today!" he thought. "But I will not allow the stainless reputation of Master-Wife and apprentice sister get ruined by those scoundrels. It seems that Master-Wife is no match for that man. Later I will have to kill Master-Wife and apprentice sister and then cut my own throat to preserve the reputation of our Huashan Sword School."

Madam Yue's sword moves became more and more disorganized. Suddenly, she turned her sword in blazing speed and thrust it out with a loud whoosh. This was none other than that proud move of hers - "Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning." The thrust carried great momentum. Regardless of Madam Yue's severe injuries, it still looked utterly majestic.

Cong Buqi was astounded. He leapt back in a great hurry and luckily was able to dodge away from it. If Madam Yue's legs had been fine and that she followed the momentum with another attack, the enemy would have no chance of surviving, but all she could do was to hold her sword like a cane to keep her balance and wheezing like mad, her face completely pale.

"What's the matter, Madam Yue? Have you finally used up all your strength? Can I search you now?" Cong Buqi grinned evilly as he stepped closer and closer toward Madam Yue, his left hand opening wide, high in the air.

Madam Yue wanted to raise her sword and thrust forward, but it seemed as if her arm had weighed ten thousand pounds by then; she could no longer move her arm.

"Hold it!" Linghu Chong yelled as he walked by Madam Yue's side. "Master-Wife!" he called out and was ready to thrust his sword out to take away her life, thus saving her from any disgraceful humiliation.

"Good child!" Madam Yue nodded, her eyes filled with satisfaction. With all her strength exhausted, she could no longer keep herself in a standing position, and collapsed down onto the muddy ground.



“Get lost!” Cong Buqi yelled out while pricking his sword tip toward Linghu Chong’s throat.

Linghu Chong knew too well that he had no strength left with his arms. If he reached his sword out to block, his sword would be instantly knocked out of his grip. So seeing that the sword tip came toward his throat, without much thinking, he also thrust his sword toward Cong Buqi’s throat – a move that would end in a common ruin for both of them. His thrust was not specifically quick, but the positioning was simply dazzling – it was none other than the “Sword-breaking Stance” out of the Dugu Nine Swords.

Cong Buqi was stunned. He had never anticipated such a sudden counter attack from the young man covered in mud. Out of desperation, he dived down the ground and rolled till he was over ten feet away, and finally was able to dodge the thrust. If he had come up with his solution only one second slower, he would not have survived it.

The entire audience watched Cong Buqi in such a sorry plight. By the time he leapt back onto his feet, his head, face, hands, and robe were completely covered with mud. Some couldn’t help but burst into laughter. But after thinking about it some more, all had to agree that other than the rolling they had just seen, there was really no other way to dodge that move.

Hearing the laughter, Cong Buqi found himself consumed by embarrassment and fury. Holding his sword tight, he charged toward Linghu Chong in a leap.

Linghu Chong had made up his mind already. “I must not use any of my inner strength, and only counter him using sword stances taught by Grand Uncle-Master.”

He was quite familiar with the Dugu Nine Swords already. He wouldn’t have used it so boldly against such a tough enemy if it weren’t a life-threatening situation for him. Right on the edge between life and death, he surprisingly found his head clear of all other thoughts. Instantly, all the complicated and magical techniques in the “Sword-breaking

Stance” came clearly before his mind’s eye. Seeing that Cong Buqi charged at him like a mad tiger, he spotted the flaw in Cong’s move instantaneously. Holding his sword in a slight angle, he aimed the tip toward Cong’s lower stomach.

When Cong Buqi charged forward, he figured that if his opponent didn’t dodge, then the opponent would have to block with his weapon, therefore, even though his lower stomach was open to attacks, he really had no need to defend that part. But to his surprise, Linghu Chong didn’t dodge and didn’t block either, only pointing his sword tip in an angle and waited for him to put his own stomach onto the sword tip. Before his feet landed back onto the ground, while his entire body was still in mid-air, Cong Buqi had realized the danger ahead. In a frantic rush, he swung his sword toward Linghu Chong’s sword. But Linghu Chong had anticipated that. He raised his right arm slightly. The sword went up two feet and now the sword tip pointed toward Cong Buqi’s chest.

Cong Buqi had hoped that when he swung his sword, it would smack against Linghu Chong’s long sword, and then he would be able to leap aside using that force. But he had never expected his opponent to turn his sword and point it upward all of a sudden. His swing was only met by thin air. And without any other forces, he could not change the direction his body was moving toward. He screamed in terror as his body flew right at Linghu Chong’s sword.

Feng Buping dived forward with a jump and reached out to grab at Cong Buqi’s back, but it was already too late. With a thump, Linghu Chong’s sword tip had penetrated Cong Buqi’s shoulder.

Missing out on the grab, Feng Buping immediately drew his sword and slashed it at Linghu Chong’s back neck. Following normal sword art principles, Linghu Chong should have jumped back quickly before returning the attack, but with all his internal energy in a state of complete chaos, which prevented him from using any bit of inner strength, he

simply couldn't jump back to dodge. Having no alternative, he retrieved his sword out from Cong Buqi's shoulder and used another technique out of the Dugu Nine Swords. Stabbing his sword out with a backhand, he pointed the sword tip at Feng Buping's belly button. It looked almost as if it was another death-defying move of Linghu Chong that would end up in common ruin, but the stab had a surprising position that his sword would have pierced the enemy's belly before the enemy's weapon would ever reach him. It would only be a split of a second difference in speed, but the end result would be dramatically different.

Feng Buping could tell that the opponent had no chance of fending off his slash, but to his great surprise, the young man conveniently launched a backhand stab toward his lower abdomen. What a vicious attack that was! He quickly took several steps back. After taking in a deep breath, he charged forward again with seven consecutive hits, each thrust or slash swifter than the previous one. The attacks swept toward Linghu Chong like a storm.

Linghu Chong gave no thought of life or death. All he had in his mind were the various sword art techniques Feng Qingyang had taught him. Occasionally, when a snapshot of the sword moves on the rock wall in the back cave flashed by in his head, he would simply use them at will following the essence flow of his swordplay. Within moments, the two had exchanged over seventy moves, yet their swords never even collided once. Regardless of attacking or defending, all the sword art techniques shown were clever and profound.

Watching the dazzling sword fight by the side, the entire audience couldn't help but cheer inwardly. Everyone could hear the heavy panting from Linghu Chong. Clearly he didn't have much strength in him. However, brilliant sword moves and techniques emerged one after another from his sword with endless variations and changes. Every time when Feng Buping had difficulty countering Linghu Chong's moves, he would simply chop and slash with sheer force, knowing that

the opponent would never try to block it and end up in a competition of strength, thus getting himself out of trouble.

Seeing the display of the undignified fighting style, some bystanders couldn't help but feel discontented. A Taoist priest from the Taishan Sword School spoke out.

"The apprentice from Qi-Branch has better sword skills and the Uncle-Master from Sword-Branch has better inner strength. What the hell is going on? Has the Qi-Branch and the Sword-Branch switched place for some fun?"

Feng Buping blushed at the remark as he waved his sword even faster, showering Linghu Chong in attacks like gusty wind and heavy rain. He was the best swordsman in the Sword-Branch of the Huashan Sword School, and his sword skills were indeed excellent.

Linghu Chong had no extra strength to move around. It already took all his strength to simply manage to stay standing. And because of that, he missed many good opportunities to secure a win. Besides, he was not yet proficient with all the sword techniques, and fighting such a top-notch fighter with his newly learned Dugu Nine Swords certainly aroused fear in his heart. As a result, the fight lasted for a long while and produced no winner.

Another thirty or so moves passed. Linghu Chong noticed that if he had simply thrust out at will, his opponent would be in a frantic rush and have a hard time dealing with it, but if he had used any of the Huashan Sword School moves or moves of the Songshan, Hengshan, or Taishan sword schools drawn on the rock wall in the back cave, Feng Buping would be able to counter well and launch his counterattack immediately after. Once when Feng Buping drew three arcs at him with his long sword, his entire right arm was almost chopped off. Awfully dangerous indeed! Amid the frenzies, Feng Qingyang's words suddenly came to his mind, "When you don't have a sword stance, your enemy would have no way of countering it. Overcoming stances without a stance achieves the ultimate acme of sword art."

Actually through the over two hundred moves he exchanged with Feng Buping, he had comprehended the superb techniques of the Dugu Nine Swords better and better. Regardless of how vicious or fierce Feng Buping's sword moves were, he would always be able to spot the weaknesses and flaws within Feng's sword moves, and a simple thrust or slash from him, at will, would always force Feng Buping to retract his sword to defend. After some more moves exchanged, he slowly gained his confidence. By the time he remembered the key of "Overcoming stances without a stance" told by Feng Qingyang, he took a long breath and thrust his sword out with an odd angle. This thrust wasn't part of any sword move, not even part of the sword moves from the "Sword-breaking Stance" of the Dugu Nine Swords. It was weak, and tilted. Even he himself didn't know where he was pointing the sword.

"What kind of move is that?" Feng Buping thought to himself, confused. Not knowing how to counter that, he waved his own sword to protect his upper body.

Since Linghu Chong didn't have any limit or restriction with that thrust to start with, seeing that his opponent had guarded his upper body well, he gave a gentle shake to the sword tip and stabbed it at Feng Buping's waist. Feng Buping didn't anticipate such an odd change at all. Astounded, he leapt back three steps, while Linghu Chong remained still, not having any strength to lunge after him.

The fight had lasted for quite a while now. Even though Linghu Chong didn't use a bit of his inner energy, waving the sword about did require quite some strength. Feeling exhausted, he breathed heavily while pressing his hand on his chest.

Realizing that Linghu Chong didn't follow up with the attack, Feng Buping didn't want the fight to just end like that. He sprang back and shot out four thrusts in a row toward Linghu Chong's chest, stomach, waist, and shoulder. Linghu Chong flicked his wrist and stabbed the sword toward

Feng's left eye. Uttering a cry of shock, Feng Buping leapt back three steps again.

"Strange! Strange! That man's sword art is very admirable," The Taoist Priest from Taishan Sword School spoke again. The entire audience felt the same way, knowing that "that man's sword art" he admired had to be Linghu Chong's sword art, not Feng Buping's.

Feng Buping also heard the remark. He thought to himself, "I am able to take over the Huashan Sword School because I am the Head Master of the Sword-Branch. If I can't even defeat an apprentice of the Qi-Branch, not only would my grandiose plan to be the Head Master of Huashan Sword School burst in bubbles, I would certainly end up living a hermit's life again in some remote valley, too ashamed to face anyone in the Martial World." At that thought, he cried inwardly, "At this point, there's no need to hide it any more!"

With a loud roar, he charged forward in an angle, slashing his long sword horizontally and then bringing it swishing down through the air in an unprecedented speed. Within only five moves, whistles from wind gusts had rose dimly. He waved his sword faster and faster and the sound of the wind gusts also became louder and louder.

This set of sword art was called the "Quick Blizzard Sword Stance," and was created by Feng Buping while he lived in seclusion in Mount Zhongtiao for fifteen years. Each move would be even faster than the previous one, and the sound of wind gust would be louder and louder as well. It was the most valued sword art of his. Having some lofty aspirations, he not only wanted to head the entire Huashan Sword School, but also wished to become the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance after getting the Head Master post. And this "Quick Blizzard Sword Stance" with one hundred and eight moves would have been the tool to help him achieve his goals. He really didn't want to recklessly show this special skill of his, because once it was shown, it would no longer be a secret weapon of his, and if he got into fights with elite fighters, the

enemy would have had precautions, and the effect of the set of sword arts would no longer be so dramatic. But there was no way to back down from the fight right now. If he couldn't defeat Linghu Chong, he would lose all face right at this moment. He was pretty much forced into using it as the last resort.

This set of "Quick Blizzard Sword Stance" was incredibly powerful without a doubt. The force created by the blade extended slowly. The audience could feel the cold front moving toward them while the wind gusts blew onto their faces and hands harshly, making them very uncomfortable, so everyone stepped back more and more. The circle around the two fighters gradually grew bigger and bigger, and soon reached the size of fifty feet in diameter.

By now, even the many masters from the Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan sword schools, and the Yue Buqun couple dared not underestimate Feng Buping. They all felt that not only his sword moves were brilliant, but also the swift and fierce force created by his blade. He apparently didn't only rely on his sword moves to win his battles. Feng Buping wasn't a renowned master in the Martial World; who would have thought that his sword skill was so incredible.

Flames from torches held by the many riders were all blown toward the outside by the forces from the blade, and the sound of wind gusts still seemed to be getting louder and louder.

In the eyes of the many witnesses, Linghu Chong was almost like a small boat traveling in a huge storm with crashing waves hundreds of feet high. In the roaring wind, terrifying waves smashed toward the small boat like landslides. But the small boat rode the wave high and low, never being swallowed by the mountain-sized waves.

The faster Feng Buping attacked, the more principles and essence of the sword art Linghu Chong comprehended based on the teaching of Feng Qingyang. The more they fought, the better Linghu Chong understood. And the better he was able

to understand the many techniques of the sword stances, the more confident he became. He found himself in no rush to end the fight; instead, he watched the various variations in the opponent's sword moves with rapt attention.

The "Quick Blizzard Sword Stance" was indeed very quick. Within moments, Feng Buping had used up the entire one hundred and eight moves. Seeing that it still failed to bring Linghu Chong down, he became restless with anxiety. Roaring in fury, he slashed and chopped with his long sword like a mad man, intending to force the opponent to block his attacks.

Linghu Chong was a bit frightened when he saw Feng Buping going all out in such a death-defying manner. Afraid to keep the fight any longer, he shook the blade of the long sword. "Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh, and swoosh!" The blade had left one cut each on Feng Buping's left arm, right arm, left leg, and right leg. "Clank," Feng Buping's sword fell down to the ground.

Because Linghu Chong didn't have much strength with his hand, the four thrusts were all done quite lightly, but that was enough to turn Feng Buping's face completely pale.

"Fine! Fine!" Feng Buping murmured. He turned around and cupped his hands toward Ding Mian, Lu Bai, and Tang Ying-E the trio. "Three apprentice brothers of the Songshan Sword School, will you please tell Chief Zuo that I am truly grateful for his great kindness. But...but my skills aren't good enough, and I am too ashamed...ashamed..." He cupped his hands again and then walked away quickly. After ten steps or so, he suddenly stopped and called out.

"Young man, your sword skills are truly incredible. I bow before you. But with such outstanding sword skills, I am sure even Yue Buqun is no match for you. May I have the honor to hear your respectful name, and the name of the great master who taught you the sword art, so I know who and what sword art I had lost to?"



"My name is Linghu Chong," Linghu Chong replied. "I am the Head Apprentice of my respectful Master – Yue Buqun. It was only because of your mercy, senior master, that I was able to win a move by sheer luck. There's nothing to be proud of."

Feng Buping heaved a long sigh, his voice dreary and gloomy. Slowly, he walked away, and soon, faded into the darkness.

Ding Mian, Lu Bai, and Tang Ying-E looked at each other, all thinking, "My sword skills perhaps aren't even as good as Feng Buping's. Then of course I would be no match for Linghu Chong, either. If we swarm forward to attack Linghu Chong all together, it wouldn't be a difficult task to slice him into bits and pieces on the spot. But when so many masters from different schools are here as well, something like that would be completely out of the question." With the same thought in mind, the three nodded at each other.

"Nephew Linghu," Ding Mian said in a loud voice, "your sword art is brilliant and broadened everyone's horizons. Farewell for now. I am sure we'll meet again someday!"

"Let's go!" Tang Ying-E waved his left hand and then turned his horse around. Giving the horse a good spur, he rode away like a wind. The rest of the group followed behind him, and within moments, all vanished into the darkness. The sounds of hoof beats became lighter and lighter, and soon, the night was, once again, swept with silence. By now, other than the bunch from the Huashan Sword School, there were only those masked men left outside of the monastery.

The old man in the mask let out a few wry laughs and broke the silence. "Young hero Linghu, you have outstanding sword skills and we all admire you truly. Yue Buqun's Kung Fu skills are far from yours. You should have been the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School." He paused for a second and then continued, "After seeing the brilliant sword art you have displayed, we really should have beaten a retreat in the face of difficulties. But since we have greatly

offended your respectful school, it's going to be endless trouble for us. Well, we must destroy both the root and the branches. I guess we'd better take advantage of you while you are injured and take you on with overwhelming numbers then."

He signaled with a whistle, and the rest of the fourteen masked men pushed their position forward and surrounded Linghu Chong. When Ding Mian and the bunch left, they threw their torches on the ground randomly. The flames had not been extinguished yet, so only the lower portion of everyone's body was lit, and their body portion above their waists remained vague in the dark. Their weapons shined from reflections of the flames as the fifteen masked men closed in on Linghu Chong.

When Linghu Chong fought Feng Buping earlier, even though it didn't consume any of his inner energy, it did exhaust him and covered him with sweat. The reason he was able to defeat the first-class master of the Huashan Sword School Sword-Branch was because he had learned the Dugu Nine Swords and was able to take the initiative of the different moves. But these fifteen men in mask had many different types of weapons and used many different styles of moves. When they all attacked at once, there would be no way for him to counter each one of them. Without the ability to use his inner energy, he couldn't even jump forward three feet or leap five feet sideways, how would he manage to break out from the combined attack of the fifteen elite fighters? He let out a deep sigh and turned his eyes toward Yue Lingshan, knowing that this would probably be the last glance before his end, and hoping that he would get some relief from the expression on Yue Lingshan's face. Sure enough, he found Yue Lingshan's pretty eyes fixed on him filled with worry and care. Linghu Chong felt a surge of joy. Then, he saw her hand hang by her side, and it was holding a hand of a man. A quick glance told Linghu Chong that the man was none other than Lin Pingzhi. Welled with

depression, Linghu Chong lost his will to fight completely and almost wanted to throw down his long sword and simply let the enemy have him.

Afraid of the brilliant performance he had shown during the fierce fight with Feng Buping, the fifteen masked men approached forward half a step at a time, on one dared to launch the first attack.

Linghu Chong turned around slowly and stared at the fifteen masked men. Their thirty eyes shined through the holes on their masks like the eyes of fierce wild animals, filled with cruelty and hostility. Suddenly, a thought sparked in his head.

“The eighth stance of the Dugu Nine Sword, ‘Missile-breaking Stance,’ can counter all types of projectiles and darts. Even if the enemy has shot thousands of arrows at me, or dozens of people shooting many kinds of projectiles and darts at me, I would be able to knock all of them down using this one stance.”

“Let’s attack all at once and cut him into shreds!” the old man in the mask shouted.

Having no time for any further thoughts, Linghu Chong sent his sword out and used the “Missile-breaking Stance” of the Dugu Nine Swords. The tip of the sword vibrated as it thrust at the eyes of the fifteen men. Cries in terror rose one after another, and then bangs echoed as the many kinds of weapons fell to the ground. Within a split of a second, Linghu Chong had blinded the thirty eyes of the fifteen masked men with extraordinarily swift thrusts.

The “Missile-breaking Stance” of the Dugu Nine Swords was capable of hitting thousands of projectiles and darts. To be able to hit the thousands of targets, of course some would be hit before some others. But because the thrusts were so fast that it seemed as if all the thrusts were shot out at the exact same time. This stance must be able to hit every target with every thrust. If one thrust had missed the target, the enemy’s dart would have hit the practitioner. Linghu Chong

was not proficient with this stance, yet, but it was obviously much easier to try to hit human eyes that were slowly approaching compared to hitting projectiles and darts approaching in high speed. He thrust out thirty times and hit all thirty eyes on target.

As soon as he completed the thrusts, Linghu Chong dashed out from the crowd. Holding on to the doorframe, he trembled hard, his face completely pale. Then a loud bang echoed as his sword fell out of his hand and hit the ground. He watched as the fifteen masked men each having their hands covering their eyes, blood dripping out from between their fingers. Some squatted down to the ground; some cried out loudly; some rolled back and forth in mud.

When the fifteen masked men, all of a sudden, saw only complete darkness accompanied by excruciating pain, in astonishment and terror, all they could think of was to cover their eyes and cry in pain. If they had been able to calm down and continue with their group attack, Linghu Chong for sure would have been chopped into shreds. But regardless of how high one's Kung Fu skills are, who would be able to stay calm when someone had blinded his eyes, all of a sudden? Who would be able to continue his attacks toward the enemy? The fifteen men stumbled about in every direction like a bunch of headless flies, not able to decide what to do next.

In the critical moment, Linghu Chong actually managed to succeed with his strike. He was overjoyed. But seeing the pitiful sight, he couldn't help but feel a mixed feeling of fear and pity.

Half shocked and half joyful, Yue Buqun yelled loudly, "Chong, cut their tendons in their legs so we can interrogate them slowly."

"Yes...yes...." Linghu Chong answered and bent down to retrieve his sword. But when he used that move a moment ago, it had actually triggered the energy flow inside him.

Trembling nonstop, he simply could not grab onto his long sword. Then his knee gave out completely and he collapsed.

“Everyone, use your right hand to pick up your weapon and use your left hand to grab onto the waistband from the one next to you. Then follow me!” the old man in the mask shouted.

The other fourteen masked men had been at a loss on what to do. Getting the command from the old man, all bent down to fumble on the ground. And regardless of what kind of weapon they were able to grab onto, they would pick it up. Some were able to pick up two and some weren't even able to find one. Each one grabbed onto a fellow masked man's waistband and stringed himself together with the group. Following the old man, all of them staggered their way through the puddles of mud and disappeared in the pouring rain.

Except for Madam Yue and Linghu Chong, all members of the Huashan Sword School had their acupoints sealed and couldn't move an inch. Madam Yue had severe wounds on both of her legs and couldn't walk. Linghu Chong, on the other hand, had lost all his strength and could only lie on the ground still. Everyone could clearly see that the fifteen masked men had become completely defenseless, yet none could keep them from getting away.

# **Chapter 13: Learning Music**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Linghu Chong tried playing the "Song of Blue Heaven". Although the fingering was not fluent, in addition, several notes were off, from the music, one could still vision the spectacular spacious view of the cloudless sky.**

The night was quiet now. The only noise came from the heavy breathings of the many Huashan apprentices.

"Hero Linghu, aren't you going to release my sealed acupoints, or are you waiting for us to beg you?" Yue Buqun suddenly broke the silence in a chilling tone.

Linghu Chong was stunned. "Master, why...why are you kidding me like that? I...I'll help release your acupoints right away." His voice trembled.

Getting back onto his feet after some hard struggles, he staggered by Yue Buqun.

"Ma...Master, which acupoints?" he asked.

Yue Buqun was furious. He remembered how Linghu Chong had put on the act of stabbing himself on Mount Huashan, not wanting to kill Tian Boguang. Then, of course, it was just the same kind of act Linghu Chong was playing right now. This way, he could let the fifteen masked men escape by intentionally not releasing his Master's sealed acupoints for a delay, afraid that his Master would chase after those masked villains. At that thought, he yelled angrily, "Save your breath!"

He continued working on gathering his inner energy using the Divine Art of the Violet Twilight in an effort to break open the sealed acupoints. Ever since the enemy had sealed his acupoints, he had been trying to break them open using his strong inner energy. But the one who had sealed his acupoints did it with a tremendous amount of force, and in addition, among the sealed acupoints were Yu-Zhen, Tan-Zhong, Ju-Zhui, Jian-Zhen, and Zhi-Tang those major acupoints. When he sent his inner energy flowing through his inner channels and passages, the flow was somewhat



blocked in those major acupoints, which greatly reduced the power of the Divine Art of Violet Twilight and made it very hard to break them open.

Linghu Chong wanted to help his Master in releasing the sealed acupoints, but he simply didn't have any strength left in him. Again and again, he struggled to raise his arm, but every time the effort only made him feel sick while seeing golden flickers circling in front of his eyes and hearing loud buzzing sound in his ear. So all he could do was to lie next to Yue Buqun and wait for his Master to release his acupoints with his own efforts.

Madam Yue also lay on the ground facing down. Earlier in the state of fury, she had accidentally misdirected her inner energy. As a result, not only couldn't she gather her strength at all, she couldn't even lift her hand up to cover the wounds on her legs.

It was already daybreak by now, and the rain had finally stopped. People's faces became clearer and clearer in the dim light of dawn. A white and thick mist appeared on Yue Buqun's head as he worked hard on breaking his sealed acupoints open. His face almost turned completely purple. Suddenly, he uttered a loud roar as his inner energy finally broke through all his sealed acupoints and begun circulation around his body. Leaping back onto his feet, he circled around all of the Huashan apprentices, patting and smacking on some of them while poking or pinching some others. Within moments, he had opened all the sealed acupoints for everyone. Then sitting by Madam Yue, he started sending his inner energy into Madam Yue through her acupoints to help her redirect her own energy flow. Meanwhile, Yue Lingshan rushed forward hurriedly and started tending the wounds on her mother's legs.

Thinking back about how narrowly everyone had escaped death the night before, all the apprentices shivered in their hearts, feeling as if they were given a new life. And the heartbreaking scene of the beheaded Liang Fa's corpse only

brought down more tears from the many Huashan apprentices. Several female apprentices burst into loud cries. The same thought floated in everyone's mind, "Fortunately big apprentice brother defeated the bunch of villains, or else it would be dreadful to even contemplate."

Seeing that Linghu Chong was still lying in a puddle of mud, Gao Gengming strode by him and prodded him up.

"Chong, where are those fifteen masked men from?" Yue Buqun asked dryly.

"I...I don't know, Master," Linghu Chong muttered.

"You do know them, right? Are they your friends?" Yue Buqun asked again.

"I've never met any one of them before last night," Linghu Chong gasped in astonishment.

"If so, when I told you to keep them here, so we could interrogate them later, why did you ignore my order?"

"I...I...was too exhausted and couldn't gather any strength. Even now...now...." His body wobbled. It looked as if just to remain standing up was already a tough task for him.

"What a fine act!" Yue Buqun snorted.

Sweat streamed down from Linghu Chong's forehead. He bent his knees and knelt down on the ground.

"I was an orphan when I was young, and thanks to the immense kindness of Master and Master-Wife, you took me under your wings and treated me like your own son. I am indeed an unworthy apprentice, but I would never dare disobey my Master's orders or deceive Master and Master-Wife intentionally."

"You dare not to deceive me and your Master-Wife? Humph, then where did you learn those sword arts of yours? Don't tell me that a spirit just fell out of the sky and taught you those in your dreams." Yue Buqun scoffed.

"I beg for your forgiveness, Master. The senior master who taught me the sword arts specifically asked me to promise that I would keep his name a secret and never tell

anyone about the origin of the sword arts, not even my Master and Master-Wife.” Linghu Chong explained hurriedly, bumping his head to the floor again and again toward his Master.

“That’s of course.” Yue Buqun sneered. “With such superb Kung Fu, it’s only natural that you think nothing of your Master and Master-Wife. How would the little bit of Kung Fu from our Huashan Sword School ever stand a chance against a blow from your super sword? Didn’t that old man in mask mention it? You should have been the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School all along.”

Daring not to reply, Linghu Chong kept kowtowing as many thoughts flashed inside his head. “If I don’t tell them how Grand Uncle-Master Feng taught me the sword arts, Master and Master-Wife would certainly not forgive me. But a true man must keep his own words. Even Tian Boguang, an evil rapist, didn’t let out anything about Grand Uncle-Master Feng when the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies performed the much torturing and torments on him. I owe Grand Uncle-Master a great debt of gratitude; I will not let him down. My loyalty towards Master and Master-Wife is true, and Heaven can be my witness. Being wronged like this temporarily is really no big deal.”

“Master, Master-Wife,” Linghu Chong said, “it’s not that I am so bold as to disobey Master’s orders. There are really some unspeakable causes here. Please allow me to beg that senior master and ask for his permission, so I can tell Master and Master-Wife everything in a later date. By then, I would not dare to keep any detail to myself.”

“Fine! You can get up now,” Yue Buqun replied.

Linghu Chong kowtowed to his Master again before standing up. Suddenly, both of his knees gave out on him and he fell back to the kneeling position. Lin Pingzhi happened to be standing next to Linghu Chong. Reaching his arm out, he propped Linghu Chong up.

"Your sword skills are excellent, and your acting skills are even better," Yue Buqun said with a sneer.

Afraid to say another word, Linghu Chong kept his silence. "I can never say enough about my gratitude to Master," he thought. "Even though he wronged me this time, one day, the truth will eventually come to light. This whole thing is so very odd. I really can't blame the respectful Master for feeling suspicious." Though he had been wronged, he really had no resentments.

Madam Yue's voice rose in a warm tone, "If it weren't for Chong's ingenious sword arts, not only would the entire Huashan Sword School be wiped out, perhaps all the female apprentices would have suffered tremendous humiliation. Regardless of who that senior master is, because he taught Chong the sword arts, we have benefited from his grace a great deal. And regarding the origin of those fifteen villains, I am sure we'll find that out one day. How could they have been Chong's friends? Weren't they going to slice Chong into shreds? Didn't Chong blind all of them with his stabs?"

His head held high, Yue Buqun seemed to have fallen into a daze and didn't hear a single word from Madam Yue.

The many apprentices soon found themselves busy with different things. Some started a fire and worked on preparing breakfast; some dug a grave and buried Liang Fa. After breakfast, everyone changed into dry clothes from their packs. All the apprentices stared at Yue Buqun and waited for his command. "Are we still going to Mount Songshan to have it out with Chief Zuo?" they all thought. "Since Feng Buping has lost to big apprentice brother in the sword contest, he would be too embarrassed to fight for the Huashan Sword School Head Master post again."

"Junior apprentice sister, where do you think we should go?" Yue Buqun asked Madam Yue.

"There's no need to go to Mount Songshan now. But since we are already far from Mount Huashan, there's no need to go back in any hurry, either," Madam Yue remarked. She was

so afraid of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and dared not to go right back so soon.

"In any case, since we have some time now, I think it's a good idea to travel around a bit and see the world. It would generate good experience for all the apprentices," Yue Buqun replied.

Yue Lingshan was overjoyed. "Wonderful, Daddy...." She clapped her hands. But she suddenly remembered that it would be very inappropriate to look so happy when her senior apprentice brother Liang Fa had just been killed. She halted abruptly only after one clap.

"Look how excited you get every time when I mention the word travel. Alright, we'll let you have the fun. Lingshan, where would you like to go visit?" Yue Buqun asked with a smile, looking toward Lin Pingzhi as he spoke.

"Daddy, if we are going to have fun, we might as well have some big fun. I say the further we go the better. It would be really disappointing if we head back after only a hundred miles out or so. Why don't we go visit Little Lin's hometown? Second apprentice brother and I have been to Fuzhou before, but too bad that I had to disguise myself into an ugly girl and didn't get to walk around much. I didn't see jack! The longan fruits in Fujian are so big and yummy. And there're also oranges, banyan trees, and narcissus flowers...."

Madam Yue shook her head. "Fujian Province is thousands of miles away from here. We don't have that kind of money to travel! Unless Huashan School turns into the Beggars Clan, and we just all beg our way through."

"Master, Master-Wife, we are only a couple of days trip away from Henan Province. My grandparents live in Luoyang," Lin Pingzhi said.

"Oh, that's right. Your grandfather Wang Yuanba, the Unbeatable Golden Blade, lives in Luoyang," Madam Yue responded.

"Both of my parents have passed away. I would love to visit my grandpa and grandma so they could get the details

on my parents' death. I am certain that my grandpa and grandma would be honored to have Master, Master-Wife, and apprentice brothers and sisters as their guests, and spend some time there. Then after that, we can take our time on our tour and visit my hometown in Fujian. I was able to seize a good amount of gold and jewels back from the Qingcheng Sword School at the Changsha branch of the Escort House, so please don't worry...about the traveling expenses," Lin Pingzhi replied.

Ever since Madam Yue stabbed the Fruit Fairy, she had been in a constant state of worry. It was all still so clear in her memory how four of the Fairies had grabbed her arms and legs and lifted her off ground. Every time she thought of it, she would freeze with terror. And then the horrifying scene of Chen Buyou's death, with blood and internal organs splashing everywhere as he was tore into four pieces, would follow, driving her crazy with fear. Horrifying nightmares had been haunting her for many nights. She knew clearly that they were really fleeing from a calamity under the name of going to Mount Songshan to reason with the Songshan Sword School. Seeing that Lin Pingzhi had invited everyone to visit Fujian after her husband gave him a glance, she figured that the further they could flee the better. Besides, her husband and herself had never visited the south part of the country before, so it didn't sound like a bad idea to check it out at all. With these thoughts in her mind, she spoke with a smile.

"Senior apprentice brother, Little Lin is offering free food and lodging. Care to take advantage of him?"

"Pingzhi's grandfather, Unbeatable Golden Blade, enjoys great fame in the central region. I've been looking forward to meeting him someday, but unfortunately never had the chance. Putian in Fujian Province is where the Southern Shaolin Temple resides. It couldn't have lacked reputable masters. Let's pay a visit to Luoyang and Fujian Province. It would certainly be a worthwhile trip if we are lucky to make some friends along the trip." Yue Buqun smiled.

Hearing that the Master had agreed to go on a trip to Fujian for fun, the many apprentices were all jubilant. Gazing at each other, Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan found themselves wild with joy.

Linghu Chong was the only one in low spirit.

“Of all the places, why did Master and Master-Wife pick Luoyang to visit apprentice brother Lin’s grandpa and Fujian, which is thousands of miles away?” Linghu Chong couldn’t help but think. “It is self-evident that they have decided to betroth little apprentice sister to apprentice brother Lin. They are going to Luoyang to visit the seniors of his family for an engagement, and when we get to Fujian, they’d probably hold the wedding ceremony right at Lin Family’s house. I am only an orphan who has no parents, nor relatives, while his family owned Fortune Prestige Escort House, which has so many branches in so many cities. How can I be any match for him? Apprentice brother Lin is going to Luoyang to visit his grandpa and grandma. When I follow him there, what would I have become?”

He felt even more displeased seeing how the apprentice brothers and sisters all bursting with joy with no regard to the tragic death of Liang Fa.

“Maybe I should just leave quietly in the dark tonight after we settle in an inn,” he thought to himself. “How can I just follow everyone else to enjoy apprentice brother Lin’s free meals and spend his money, and then put on an air of cheerfulness to congratulate little apprentice sister and him, wishing them to live happily ever after?”

The group of Huashan School hit the road again as Linghu Chong followed behind. Weak and exhausted, he walked slower and slower, and soon, he fell far behind everyone else. By noon, he decided to sit down on a big rock alongside the road to catch his breath, when he saw Lao Denuo stride back in big steps.

“Big apprentice brother! How do you feel? You must be tired. I’ll wait for you,” Lao Denuo said.

"Oh, thanks!" Linghu Chong replied.

"Master-Wife has hired a wagon for you in the town ahead. It should be coming anytime now," Lao Denuo mentioned.

Warmth swelled in Linghu Chong's heart. "Although Master is suspicious of me, Master-Wife is still treating me dearly," he thought to himself.

Not long after, a mule-pulled wagon showed up. Linghu Chong entered the wagon and Lao Denuo accompanied him by his side. That night, when they settled in an inn, Lao Denuo shared the same room with him. And in the following two days, Lao Denuo never even went out of his sight. Linghu Chong was quite grateful that a fellow apprentice brother was so kind to care for a wounded patient.

"When junior apprentice brother Lao joined our Huashan School, he had already received prior martial arts training. He is much older than I am, and wouldn't even spare much word with me during normal days. Who would have thought that he would treat me with so much caring after what happened to me. All the other apprentice brothers don't even dare to talk with me much, after seeing the stern face Master has shown me. The old saying is so true: As distance will test a horse's endurance, so will time reveal a person's heart."

At the third night, as Linghu Chong was resting in bed with his eyes shut, some kind of whisper suddenly caught his attention. It was little apprentice brother Shu Qi whispering at the door.

"Second apprentice brother, Master sent me to check with you if big apprentice brother has done anything unusual today."

"Hush! Outside!" Lao Denuo hushed hurriedly and whispered back.

A cold shiver ran through Linghu Chong's heart. Just from these few words he had realized what a tremendous suspicion Master actually had toward him. Master only sent Lao Denuo to secretly keep a watch on his every move.



Shu Qi walked away on tiptoes, and Lao Denuo walked by the bed slowly to check if Linghu Chong had really fallen asleep.

Infuriated, Linghu Chong almost wanted to leap onto his feet right away and yell at him, but then he had a second thought.

“Why should I blame him? He really has nothing to do with this. He is only following Master’s order. Would he have dared to defy the Master?” So he forced back his anger and pretended to have fallen asleep.

Lao Denuo walked out of the room gingerly. Linghu Chong knew that he must have gone to the Master for a report. He couldn’t help but sneer inwardly, “Humph, I never did anything guilty. Even if you have ten or one hundred people watching every step of mine, days and nights, I am open and aboveboard. What’s there for me to be afraid of?”

Indignation filled his heart as he breathed wildly, and suddenly, it triggered a slight inner energy flow inside him. Waves of energy streams swirled inside him and made him feel miserable. He held onto the headrest tightly and gasped loudly. Only after a long while, the nausea finally went away. He sat up, threw on some clothing, and started to put on his shoes, thinking, “Since Master is no longer treating me like an apprentice of his, and instead, is on guard against me as if I am a thief, why should I even bother to stay in the Huashan Sword School? Maybe it would be better if I simply leave and not worry about whether Master would ever understand me one day.”

Right at that moment, he heard more whispers from under the window on the outside.

“Stay down and don’t move,” a voice said.

“Sounds like big apprentice brother is getting off his bed,” another voice replied.

The two said those words in whisper, but because it was a silent night, besides that Linghu Chong had excellent hearing abilities, he was actually able to hear every single

word clearly and also recognize that the voices belonged to two young apprentice brothers of his. Apparently they were hiding in the courtyard to guard the room in case Linghu Chong would flee.

Linghu Chong clenched his fists hard. Cracks from his knuckles echoed in the silent night. "If I leave now, they would think that my guilty conscience has overcome me, and I am running away. Fine! Fine! I'd rather stay! You can do whatever you want to me! What do I care?" he thought.

"Waiter, waiter! Bring me some wine!" he suddenly broke into a loud yell.

After quite some shouting, the waiter finally answered and brought him some wine. One cup after another, Linghu Chong slammed the wine down his throat. Soon he became dead drunk and passed out. The next morning when Lao Denuo prodded him into the wagon, half drunk and half awake, he just kept yelling, "Bring me more wine, I want more wine!"

Several days later, the Huashan group arrived at the city of Luoyang and settled in a big inn. Lin Pingzhi went to his grandfather's house by himself, first. Yue Buqun and the bunch of apprentices all changed into clean clothing. Linghu Chong never took off the mud stained long robe he wore in the fierce fight outside of the monastery, so he was still covered with filth and looked very drunk. Yue Lingshan came to him with a long robe in her hands.

"Big apprentice brother, will you change into this robe please?"

"This is Master's robe. Why do you want me to put it on?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Little Lin is inviting us to his family a bit later. Why don't you put Dad's robe on?" Yue Lingshan answered.

"Who said we have to put on nice clothing before visiting his family?" Linghu Chong snubbed as he looked at Yue Lingshan up and down.

Yue Lingshan wore a thin cotton-padded jacket with green silk tops paired with a light green satin skirt. She had put on a thin layer of makeup on her face. Her dark hair was neatly combed and shined beautifully with a flower shaped pearl hairpin by the side. Linghu Chong remembered that she would only dress up nicely during the Chinese New Year. Feeling bitter in his heart, he wanted to spill out some more mocking words, but then he thought that a true man shouldn't act so narrow-mindedly, and held his tongue.

Yue Lingshan felt somewhat embarrassed from Linghu Chong's sharp stare. "If you don't want to, then you don't have to change," she said.

"I am not used to wearing new clothes. I'd better not change then," Linghu Chong replied.

Not wanting to argue with him, Yue Lingshan left with the robe still in her hands.

A resonant voice rose from outside the door, "Head Master Yue has come such a long way here, and I didn't greet promptly. What a lack of manners!"

Yue Buqun knew that it must have been the Unbeatable Golden Blade – Wang Yuanba – who had come to the inn personally to greet them. Casting a pleased smile toward his wife, he felt quite contented. After the couple greeted out, what they saw was an old man in his seventies. His face shined in a healthy redness while the bush of grey beard drifted in the breeze. He looked certainly hale and hearty. In his left palm were two goose-egg-sized golden balls, which rubbed against each other and echoed as he rolled them in his hand. It was common for martial people to play with iron balls in their hands, but they would have been made out of iron or steel. What Wang Yuanba had in his hands were two balls made from pure gold, which not only were twice the weight of regular iron balls, but also looked much more luxurious. As soon as he spotted Yue Buqun, he burst into joy.

"What an honor this is! Head Master Yue has such a great reputation in the Martial World. I have been longing to meet

you for the last twenty years. Now that you have come to Luo Yang, what a wonderful event it is for the martial arts society in the central region."

He shook Yue Buqun's right hand again and again happily. The joy on his face was truly sincere.

"My wife and I have decided to bring our apprentices to travel around so they could gain some experience in the world," Yue Buqun said with a smile. "And you, the Unbeatable Golden Blade Grandmaster Wang, the Great Master of the Central Region, is the first on our list to visit, but the dozens of us are really being crude to just show up so abruptly uninvited."

"Alright now, nobody is allowed to mention the words 'Unbeatable Golden Blade' again in front of Head Master Yue. Anyone mentioning those words would be only putting me down instead of flattering me. Mr. Yue, your saving of my grandson is a favor tantamount to giving him a new lease on life. Starting from now on, the House of Golden Blade and the Sword School of Huashan are both parts of one big family. Come, come! All of you will move to my house. No one will be allowed to leave until you have lived in my house for at least half a year. Head Master Yue, I'll even help you carry your luggage."

"That's very kind of you! I certainly don't deserve that!" Yue Buqun replied in a hurry.

"Bofen, Zhongqiang, kowtow to Uncle-Master Yue and Uncle-Master-Wife Yue," Wang Yuanba turned his head and called to his two sons standing behind him.

Wang Bofen and Wang Zhongqiang both acknowledged and knelt down to salute. In a hurry, the Yue Buqun couple also knelt down to salute back.

"Please just call us by our names. 'Uncle-Master' would be so inappropriate. Even just for Pingzhi's sake, we are of the same generation," Yue Buqun remarked.

Wang Bofen and Wang Zhongqiang are both famous masters around the Henan Province and Hubei Province.

Though they had always admired Yue Buqun, neither of them really wanted to kowtow to him. They had knelt down reluctantly only because their father had told them to do so, so both were very pleased to see that the Yue Buqun couple also kowtowed back to them. All four of them stood up after saluting each other.

Yue Buqun took a good look at the two: both brothers were tall, only that Wang Zhongqiang was a lot chubbier in comparison, and both had temples plumped high and strong veins and bones that could be clearly seen on their hands. Evidently, the two brothers had great strength both internally and externally.

"All of you come forward and show your respect to Grandmaster Wang and the two Uncle-Masters," Yue Buqun called out to the Huashan apprentices. "The House of Golden Blade's martial arts skills enjoyed a great reputation in the central region of the martial society. Our Grandmaster in the last generation also respected the House of Golden Blade very much. You are very fortunate to have Grandmaster Wang and the two Uncle-Masters give you some pointers. I am sure you will all benefit a great deal from this."

"Yes, Master!" the many apprentices replied in unison, and seconds later, the lobby of the inn was filled with apprentices kneeling down on the floor, showing their respects.

"You really flatter me!" Wang Yuanba smiled brightly as Wang Bofen and Wang Zhongqiang both cupped their hands and greeted back with a half salute.

Lin Pingzhi stood by the side and introduced each of the Huashan apprentices to his grandpa. The Wang Family was a wealthy family. Wang Yuanba had prepared presents for each of the guests ahead of time. Each gift consisted of forty taels of silver. The two brothers in the Wang Family took on the job of distributing the presents. By the time Lin Pingzhi introduced Yue Lingshan, Wang Yuanba said to Yue Buqun with a big grin.

“Little brother Yue, your daughter is such a beautiful girl; is she engaged to anyone yet?”

“The girl is still too young. Besides, in a martial family like ours, a girl plays with swords and knives all day long just like any boy would. She doesn’t know anything about embroidering or cooking. Who would want such a wild girl to be their daughter-in-law?” Yue Buqun also grinned.

“You are really being modest!” Wang Yuanba replied with a beam. “An extraordinary family would, of course, raise an extraordinary daughter. It is only natural that lads from ordinary families would not have dared to claim kinship with her. But you are right, it would be better if the girl learned some girly things.” At that word, he lowered his voice and seemed to have lost in deep feelings.

Yue Buqun knew that he must have thought of his daughter who had passed away in Hunan Province not long ago, so he put on a solemn face and responded, “Yes.”

Wang Yuanba was a man of frank and open personality. He quickly put himself together from the pain of losing a daughter and spoke again with a bright smile.

“Your daughter is talented and beautiful. It would certainly be a difficult task to find a young hero good enough to pair up with her.”

By then, Lao Denuo had gone back in the inn room and prodded Linghu Chong out. Staggering along, Linghu Chong kowtowed to neither Wang Yuanba nor the Wang brothers, and only bowed down deeply.

“Linghu Chong here shows his respect to Grandmaster Wang and the two Uncle-Masters,” he said.

“Aren’t you going to kowtow?” Yue Buqun frowned.

Wang Yuanba had heard from his grandson earlier that Linghu Chong had severe internal wounds, so he said with a smile, “Nephew Linghu is not feeling well. There’s no need for excessive manners. Little brother Yue, your Huashan School’s inner energy skill is said to be the best in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, then I am sure your wine tolerance must be

extraordinary. Come on! Let's go drink ten bowls of wine each."

Holding Yue Buqun's hand in his own, he led Yue Buqun out of the inn. Madam Yue, Wang Bofen, Wang Zhongqiang, and the rest of the Huashan apprentices all followed behind them. Many wagons and horses had been lined up outside of the inn with fine-looking saddles and bridle; wagons for all the females and horses for the males, ready to take the honorable guests. It was a mere two hours between the time Lin Pingzhi headed out to inform the Wang Family and the time Wang Yuanba came to the inn to greet his guests. Only from the fact that all the wagons and horses had been ready in such a short time, one can easily tell the kind of great power the Golden Blade Wang Family enjoyed in the city of Luoyang.

The group soon arrived at the mansion of the Wang Family. The building looked tall and majestic with a gate painted in vermilion. The two huge copper rings attached to the gate must have been cleaned frequently as they dazzled brilliantly in the sunlight. Eight brawny guards stood by the gate silently, their arms behind their back, all ready to take commands from their Master. And inside the gate, a huge black board hung from the girder with the words "Help for a Just Cause" painted in gold. The words at the lower portion of the board showed that a governor of Henan Province had inscribed the calligraphy.

That night, Wang Yuanba put out a large banquet to welcome Yue Buqun and the rest of the Huashan apprentices. Not only did he invite many famous masters in the local martial arts society to welcome the noble visitors, among the guests were also numerous wealthy business owners and local celebrities. Linghu Chong was the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, so other than his Master Yue Buqun, he had the most seniority among all the male visitors. Noticing the filthy and tattered clothing he was wearing and the listless face of his, all the guests found themselves

puzzled inside. But it was common knowledge that the Martial World did not lack people of strange and unique behaviors. Didn't elite masters from the Beggars Clan all wear ragged clothing? Since he was the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, he couldn't have been ordinary; therefore no one had any belittling thought about Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong was seated at the second table, accompanied by one of the hosts, Wang Bofen. Soon, the wine had gone around three times. Wang Bofen couldn't help but notice that Linghu Chong had maintained an indifferent face throughout the time, and would only reply once a while to his attempt to make conversations – apparently Linghu Chong didn't really think much of him at all. Then he remembered that earlier in the inn, Linghu Chong didn't even kowtow to them, yet had no problem accepting the present of forty taels of silver. Feeling very displeased, he decided to change the topic to something in regards to martial arts techniques. So he casually asked for Linghu Chong's opinion on several martial arts related questions that were in the advanced level, but Linghu Chong only nodded and agreed, never really answering any of them.

Actually, Linghu Chong didn't have any ill feeling against Wang Bofen at all. It was just that after seeing the luxurious life of the Wang Family, he realized that the difference between his indigence and the wealth of the Wang Family was so dramatic. It was almost like the difference between Heaven and earth. Lin Pingzhi had changed into a long robe made of silk brocade after he came to his grandfather's house. He had a handsome face to start with, so after dressing up, he looked extremely elegant and graceful. Linghu Chong simply couldn't help but feel a sense of inferiority and inadequacy.

“Even if little apprentice sister didn't become a couple with him and stayed the same to me, what future would she have staying with a pauper like me?” he thought.



All his minds focused around Yue Lingshan, so naturally, regardless of what Wang Bofen said to him, nothing really went into his ears.

Enjoying a great fame in the martial arts society around the central region, Wang Bofen had been used to people fawning on him left and right, yet tonight, he kept getting snags from the young man named Linghu Chong. Normally, he would have let his temper loose right at the beginning, but for the sake of his dead sister and the fact that his father had great respect toward the Huashan Sword School, he worked hard to hold his temper down and just kept toasting to Linghu Chong.

Every time when someone toasted Linghu Chong, he would slam down the wine in his cup without thinking, so before he even knew it, forty cups of wine or so had gone down his throat. He used to have very good tolerance of wine. Even over a hundred cups worth of wine wouldn't have made a difference for him. But because he had lost all his inner energy, his tolerance was reduced quite a bit. And in addition, with a tremendous amount of anxiety gnawing at his heart, each cup of wine seemed to have had a much greater effect on him. By the time he drank up all those forty cups of wine, he was already feeling dizzy.

"This lad doesn't know the ways of the world at all," Wang Bofen thought. "My nephew is your apprentice brother, so you should have called me an Uncle-Master, or simply uncle. It is all right that you didn't call me an uncle, but how dare you ignore me completely like this? Very well! I am going to get you drunk and let you make a fool out of yourself in front of all these guests."

Seeing that Linghu Chong could barely keep his eyes open and was tipsy already, he said with a smile, "Little brother Linghu is the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, and sure enough, he is an outstanding young hero. Not only is his Kung Fu skill extraordinary, his wine tolerance

is also extraordinary. Servants! Get rid of the tiny cup. Get Mister Linghu a big bowl and keep it filled!"

The servants cheered and filled Linghu Chong's bowl with wine. Throughout Linghu Chong's life, he had never stopped anyone from pouring wine for him, so as soon as his bowl was filled, he would empty it down his throat. Not long after, he had drunk up another five or six bowls worth of wine. Suddenly, with a wave of his arm, he swept all the plates and cups in front of him off the table.

"Young hero Linghu has had a drop too much! Better drink a cup of hot tea to sober up," guests from the same table all suggested.

"There's no way the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School would get drunk so easily! Little brother Linghu, drink up!" Wang Bofen beamed as he filled Linghu Chong's bowl once again.

"Who...who said I am drunk? Bottoms up!" Linghu Chong replied.

He picked up the wine and started pouring it down with big swallows. Half of the wine actually ended up dripping down his robe. All of a sudden, his body jerked as he opened his mouth wide and started vomiting, and seconds later, the entire tabletop was covered with "wine" and "dishes" that had been inside his stomach just moments ago. People around the table dodged backward in shock while a smirk ran across Wang Bofen's lips.

Hundreds of pairs of eyes were immediately fixed onto Linghu Chong. Yue Buqun and Madam Yue both frowned, thinking, "This lad really doesn't know how to behave in formal occasions. He has just made a fool of himself in front of so many noble guests."

Lao Denuo and Lin Pingzhi both rushed forward and held Linghu Chong in support.

"Big apprentice brother, why don't I walk you back to rest?" Lin Pingzhi suggested.

"I...I am not drunk. I can drink more. Give me more wine!" Linghu Chong rebuffed.

"Sure! Sure! Someone brings some more wine out," Lin Pingzhi replied.

"You...you...Little Lin, why aren't you spending time with little apprentice sister? What are you dragging me for?" Linghu Chong cast a sidelong and bleary-eyed glance at Lin Pingzhi.

"Big apprentice brother," Lao Denuo said, "let's go take a break. There's a bit crowd here, we've got to watch our mouth."

"Watch my mouth? Humph! Master sent you to keep watch on me. Have you found any proof yet?" Linghu Chong snapped.

Afraid that Linghu Chong could speak anything without thinking in his drunkenness, Lao Denuo held Linghu Chong's arms and pushed him all the way into the guest room at the back with the help from Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Buqun also heard Linghu Chong's words. Even though Yue Buqun was well self-cultivated, he couldn't help but show an annoyed face.

"Little brother Yue," Wang Yuanba soothed, "that was only nonsense from the mouth of a drunken young lad. Why bother? Come on, let's enjoy our wine!"

"The lad is from the countryside and hasn't had much chance with formal settings. Will you please pardon him, Grandmaster Wang?" Yue Buqun replied with a forced smile.

After the banquet was over, Yue Buqun told Lao Denuo to stop following Linghu Chong around and only watch him in secret.

It was not until the next afternoon before Linghu Chong finally woke up. Remembering none of what he had said the previous day, he found himself with a terrible headache – almost felt as if his head had been cracked open. Taking a look around, he found himself the only occupant of a neat and clean room. He stepped out of the guest room but didn't

see any of his apprentice brothers. After inquiring the servants, he learned that they all went to the Training Hall at the backside to swap pointers in martial arts training with the sons and apprentices of the Wang Family.

“Why bother tangle up with them? I’d be better off just take a hike myself,” Linghu Chong thought to himself as he stalked out of the gate and off to the street.

Luo Yang had been the capital for many different dynasties. There were many good-sized buildings everywhere, yet the streets weren’t very busy. Linghu Chong was not very literate and only had a very limited knowledge about history. Staring at the many historical sites in the city of Luoyang, he had no idea as to what they were and what they were for. Bored stiff, he strolled aimlessly into a small alley. Then something caught his attention. Seven or eight local punks were playing a game of gambling inside a small tavern. Pushing his way through the crowd to the front, he took out the package of the present he had received from Wang Yuanba the previous day. Retrieving the silver out, he joined the game with keen interests. Not until dusk did he finally returned, tipsy from drinking more wine. For the next several days, he kept going back to gamble and drink with the bunch of local punks. In the first couple of days, he had some good luck and won several taels of silver, but by the fourth day, he kept losing, and soon his forty taels of silver were completely cleaned out. Naturally, the group of punks kicked him out of the game. Feeling quite infuriated, Linghu Chong kept asking for more wine, but after only a couple of kettles of wine were served, the bartender asked.

“Young man, you’ve lost all your money in the gambling game. How are you going to pay for the wine?”

“Write it under my tab. I’ll pay you tomorrow,” Linghu Chong replied.

“Our business is very small. We don’t give credits to anyone, not even relatives or close friends.” The bartender shook his head.

Infuriated, Linghu Chong snarled, "How dare you think I don't have any money!"

"Sorry," the bartender replied with a smirk, "show your money and you'll get your wine! No money, no wine, no credit!"

Linghu Chong glanced over himself. His ragged and tattered clothing certainly didn't help convince the bartender that he might be a wealthy man. Other than the long sword by his waist, he really didn't have anything else that might be worth any money, so he untied the long sword from his waistband and threw it onto the table.

"Take this to the pawnshop!" he said.

Wanting to win more money out from him, one of the punks replied in a rush, "Sure! I'll pawn it for you!" He took the long sword and left.

With that assurance, the bartender took out another two kettles of wine for Linghu Chong. By the time Linghu Chong finished one, the punk had returned with some small pieces of silver.

"It's pawned for three taels and four ounces," the punk said as he gave the silver and the pawn ticket to Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong weighted the silver in his hand. It didn't even weigh a full three taels, but he didn't complain and went straight back into the gambling game. The game lasted till around dusk when the three taels of silver exchanged hands again - from both losing in the gambling and paying for the wine he drank.

"Hey, loan me three taels of silver. I'll pay you back double the amount if I win," Linghu Chong said to a punk named Twitch-Lip Chen.

"What if you lose?" Twitch-Lip Chen asked with a snicker.

"If I lose, I'll pay you back tomorrow," Linghu Chong answered.

"How do I know if you have money at home or not? If you lose, how are you going to pay me back? Are you gonna sell

your bitch or your sister then?" Twitch-Lip Chen mocked.

Linghu Chong's anger exploded. He raised his arm and slapped Chen across the face with a backhand. By then, he had consumed a good amount of wine and was already half drunk. Reaching out, he snatched the small pile of silver in front of Twitch-Lip Chen.

"What the hell! This son of a bitch is a mugger," Twitch-Lip Chen yelled out loud.

The group of punks all came from the same clan, and immediately, they swarmed forward and started throwing punches toward Linghu Chong. Having no sword in his hand and having no strength to defend himself, Linghu Chong was pushed down on the ground. The punks punched and kicked, and within moments, gave Linghu Chong bruises all over his face and his body.

Sounds of hoof beats rose. Several horses came by in short trots.

"Move out of the way! Get lost!" someone on the horseback yelled and whipped his horsewhip to drive away the punks.

Linghu Chong just lay still on the ground face down and couldn't even get up.

A girl's voice suddenly cried out, "Isn't that big apprentice brother?" It was the voice of Yue Lingshan.

"Let me take a look," another voice answered. It was Lin Pingzhi this time.

Lin Pingzhi dismounted from his horse and then turned Linghu Chong's body around. "Big apprentice brother? Are you ok?" he cried out in shock as soon as he recognized Linghu Chong's face.

"I got drunk! And I lost my bets!" Linghu Chong squeezed out a wry smile and shook his head.

In a hurry, Lin Pingzhi propped him up and helped him onto the horseback. Besides Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan, there were four other riders in the pack – they were the two daughters of Wang Bofen and the two sons of Wang

Zhongqiang, cousins of Lin Pingzhi. The six of them had set out in the morning to tour around the various temples and historical sites in the city of Luoyang, and were on their way back home after the fun. They certainly didn't expect to find a Linghu Chong all beat up in the middle of the small alley. All four of them were astounded.

"The Huashan Sword School is a member of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance," they thought. "When Grandpa mentioned about them, he would always praise dearly. And when we exchanged pointers with them in martial arts a couple of days ago, they did each show outstanding Kung Fu skills. Isn't this Linghu Chong the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School? How come he couldn't even overcome several local punks? But if Linghu Chong's nose was really bleeding so badly, how could this not be true? How odd!"

Returning back to Wang Yuanba's mansion, Linghu Chong slowly recovered after several days of good rest. Yue Buqun and Madam Yue were both aggravated at the news that Linghu Chong went gambling with some local rascals and went in a fistfight after losing his money, and neither of them paid a visit to him. By the fifth day, Wang Jiaju, the younger son of Wang Zhongqiang, walked in Linghu Chong's room excitedly.

"Big brother Linghu, I've vented the spleen for you today! I gathered up the seven punks who beat you up that day and gave them each some good lashes."

Linghu Chong didn't really mind this incident much, so he replied casually, "That's really not necessary. I got drunk that day, and it was really my fault to start with."

"Nah, they can't do that to you. You are a guest of the Golden Blade Wang Family. How can the Golden Blade Wang Family let its guest get beat up in the city of Luoyang and not get even? If we don't straighten this out, would others still show the same kind of respect to the Golden Blade Wang Family?" Wang Jiaju disagreed.

Deep inside Linghu Chong's heart, he had already disliked the "Golden Blade Wang Family." Now when he heard Wang Jiaju mention the "Golden Blade Wang Family" left and right, as if the "Golden Blade Wang Family" was the most powerful and influential family in the entire Martial World, he couldn't help but mock, "It sure takes the Golden Blade Wang Family to deal with a bunch of punks and rascals."

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, he regretted saying them. Just when he was about to apologize, Wang Jiaju had responded with a stern face.

"Brother Linghu, what are you talking about? If it weren't for my brother and I who drove those seven punks away, would you still be alive today?"

"I do owe the two of you a debt of gratitude for saving my life," Linghu Chong replied with a casual smile.

Wang Jiaju could tell from how Linghu Chong said the words that it was sarcastic and that he didn't mean it at all. Feeling more irritated, he snapped.

"You are the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, yet you couldn't even handle a couple of local punks and rascals in Luoyang. Humph, aren't people going to say that you don't deserve your reputation?"

At this time, Linghu Chong really didn't care about anything. So he replied, "I don't even have a reputation to start with, what's there to deserve or what not?"

"Brother, what are you discussing about with brother Linghu?" a voice rose from outside the door. Then the curtain was lifted and a man walked in. It was Wang Jiajun, the elder son of Wang Zhongqiang.

"Brother, I thought I'd be doing him a favor and help vent his anger, when I gathered up those seven punks, and gave each of them some good lashing. Who would have thought that this Hero Linghu would blame me for interfering?" Wang Jiaju exclaimed angrily.

"Ah, there's something you don't know," Wang Jiajun responded. "I just heard from apprentice sister Yue a moment



ago that this brother Linghu is very good at concealing his real abilities. That day outside the monastery of the Buddha of Herb, he blinded fifteen first-class fighters' eyes with only one swing of his long sword. What brilliant sword art that must have been! Got to be very rare indeed! Ha-ha!" His grin had a sense of mockery. Obviously he didn't believe a single word from Yue Lingshan.

Wang Jiaju also let out a big grin. "I suppose the martial arts skills of those fifteen first-class fighters must be far from the martial arts skills of the local punks in Luoyang then! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

Those words didn't bother Linghu Chong a bit. He chuckled and then simply sat down on his chair, swaying back and forth gently with his arms around his right knee.

Wang Jiajun was actually sent here by his father and his uncle to interrogate Linghu Chong. Originally, the brothers Wang Bofen and Wang Zhongqiang had told him to try to coax secret using kind words without offending the guest, but seeing the arrogant look on Linghu Chong's face and how he had treated the two brothers like dirt, he lost his temper.

"Brother Linghu, would you be kind enough to answer a question of mine?" He raised his voice high.

"Certainly," Linghu Chong answered.

"I heard from cousin Pingzhi that when my uncle and aunt passed away, brother Linghu was the only one there to attend upon," Wang Jiajun said.

"That's right." Linghu Chong nodded.

"Then it was you, brother Linghu, who passed the last words from my uncle and aunt to my cousin Pingzhi?" Wang Jiajun continued.

"Correct," Linghu Chong replied.

"Then how about my uncle's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?" Wang Jiajun pressed on.

At these words, Linghu Chong stood up abruptly. "What did you say?" he yelled loudly.

Worried that Linghu Chong might launch a sudden attack against him, Wang Jiajun took a step back.

"My uncle owned the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' and asked you to give it to my cousin Pingzhi. Why haven't you given it to him?" he charged.

Hearing such irresponsible calumny from him, Linghu Chong trembled in rage. "Who...who said that there's an 'Evil-Resisting Sword...Sword Manuscript' for...for me to give to apprentice brother Lin?" he asked with a trembling voice.

"If there isn't one, why do you look so scared and can't even talk right? Aren't you showing a guilty conscience?" Wang Jiajun challenged with a smirk.

"Brothers, I am a guest here in your house. Do these words of yours represent what your father and grandpa think of me, or simply what the two of you think of me?" Linghu Chong asked, working hard to control his temper.

"I am just asking you a casual question. What's the big deal? It has nothing to do with my grandpa or my dad. But it is well known in the Martial World that the Evil-Resisting Sword Art of the Lin Family in Fuzhou is a very powerful sword art. Since Uncle Lin passed away so abruptly, and the precious 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' that he always carried with him disappeared all of a sudden, as his close relatives, we certainly want to hear about it," Wang Jiajun replied.

"Little Lin sent you to ask me the question, didn't he? Why doesn't he come and ask himself?" Linghu Chong mocked.

"Cousin Pingzhi is your junior apprentice brother. How would he ever dare to ask you?" Wang Jiajun let out some laughs.

"Now with your Luoyang Golden Blade Wang Family backing him up, humph, you sure can force me to talk now. Why don't you go get Lin Pingzhi now?" Linghu Chong sneered.

"You are the guest of the house. We dare not force you to talk. The two brothers of us are simply curious about it; that's why we asked the question. If brother Linghu is willing to answer, that would be great. If you do not want to answer, then there's really nothing we can do about it," Wang Jiajun said.

Linghu Chong nodded. "I don't want to answer. There's nothing you can do about it. Please leave me alone now!"

The Wang brothers gazed at each other in speechless despair. Neither had expected Linghu Chong to be so straightforward and closed the topic so quickly. Wang Jiajun cleared his throat and then tried to start the conversation again.

"Brother Linghu, you blinded fifteen first-class fighters' eyes with only one thrust of your sword. This move is brilliant. Perhaps you learned it from the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' didn't you?"

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. Cold sweats broke out all over his body and his hands trembled. It had all become so clear to him now: "I have been wondering about this for many days. Why didn't Master, Master-Wife, and the bunch of apprentice brothers and sisters feel grateful that I saved their lives, yet they all became suspicious of me? Now I know! That's it! So they are all convinced that I embezzled Lin Zhennan's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' Since they've never seen the Dugu Nine Swords before, and I refuse to let out the secret that Grand Uncle-Master Feng trained me in sword art, when they saw that my sword skills progressed so tremendously, all of a sudden, after spending several months on top of the 'Cliff of Contemplation,' they all concluded that I had learned brilliant sword techniques from the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' If that wasn't the case, where else would I be able to learn such terrific sword arts? It was such a coincident that Grand Uncle-Master Feng showed up and taught me sword arts. No one would ever have expected that. But when the Lin Zhennan couple passed away, I was

the only one by their side, so naturally everyone would assume that the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript', the ultimate sword art book that many elite masters would cast greedy eyes on, had fallen into my hands. It is understandable that others would have guessed like that. But Master and Master-Wife have brought me up, and little apprentice sister is as close to me as a real sister. They all know me well yet didn't trust me on this one. Humph, you have really belittled me!" At that thought, his face naturally showed the expression of indignation.

"I guessed it right, didn't I?" Wang Jiajun said with a triumphant grin on his lips. "Where is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' then? We are not interested in reading it at all. All we want is to return the manuscript to its rightful owner. Just give the sword art manuscript back to cousin Lin, will you?"

"I've never seen any 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'." Linghu Chong shook his head. "Chief Master Lin and his wife were taken prisoners, first by the Qingcheng Sword School, then by 'Hunchback of the North' Mu Gaofeng. If he had any sword art manuscript on him, they would have found it first."

"Precisely!" Wang Jiajun immediately followed. "The 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' is so precious. Why would my uncle and aunt carry it everywhere with them? Of course they had hid it in a very secret place, and only before they passed away, they asked you to pass the message on to cousin Pingzhi. Who would have thought...who would have thought that...? Humph!"

"Who would have thought that you would go find it behind everyone's back and embezzled it to be your own!" Wang Jiajun finished the sentence for his brother.

The more Linghu Chong heard, the angrier he became. He really didn't want to argue any more, but since this was a very important matter, he would not want to take the blame for it. So he responded.

“If Chief Master Lin really had such a brilliant sword arts manuscript, he should have become invincible himself. Why couldn’t he even defeat a couple of apprentices from the Qingcheng Sword School and was taken prisoner by them?”

“That...that....” Wang Jiaju could not find any answer to that question and became tongue-tied.

Wang Jiajun, on the other hand, had a glib tongue. He argued, “That wasn’t unique. Brother Linghu, you learned the Evil-Resisting Sword Art and achieved outstanding sword skills, yet you couldn’t even defeat several punks and rascals and was taken prisoner by them. How are you going to explain that then? Ha-ha, it’s called pretending. It’s too bad that you have gone a bit too far this time. The Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School couldn’t even defend himself against several punks on the Luoyang streets. No one will ever be convinced by this act of yours. And since this is completely impossible, then it must be a trick. Brother Linghu, why don’t you listen to my advice and just admit it?”

Under normal circumstances, Linghu Chong would have answered back sarcastically. But what had happened was such a coincidence, which set him right under the spotlight with the most suspicion. He cared nothing about the “Golden Blade Wang Family” or the young Wang brothers, but he couldn’t let Master, Master-Wife, and little apprentice sister be suspicious of him.

“I, Linghu Chong, have never seen anything called ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.’ What Chief Master Lin from Fuzhou told me before he passed away I have already passed on to apprentice brother Lin without omitting a single word. If I had lied about any part of it, may Heaven cast me down to Hell for eternal suffering and never bring me back,” Linghu Chong spoke with a solemn face. He positioned his hands behind his back after those words, his face looking awe-inspiring with ultimate righteousness.

“Did you think you can get yourself off the hook so easily just by swearing a casual oath? We are talking about a

serious matter concerning a secret martial arts manuscript here. Did you think everyone is plain stupid?" Wang Jiajun grinned.

"So what's your idea then?" Linghu Chong asked while forcing himself to stay calm.

"Please pardon our boldness, but we'd like to make a body search on you, brother Linghu," Wang Jiajun suggested. He paused for a second and then added with a smirk, "That day when brother Linghu was seized by those seven punks and couldn't move a muscle, they could have searched all over you, couldn't they?"

"You want to make a body search on me? Humph! Are you saying that I am a thief?" Linghu Chong mocked with a sneer.

"We dare not!" Wang Jiajun replied. "Since you stated that you never took the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Art,' why be afraid to let us search you? Once we do a body search on you and there isn't any sword manuscript on you, you would be cleared from suspicion. Wouldn't you want that?"

"Fine! Why don't you go get apprentice brother Lin and apprentice sister Yue, so the two of them can be witnesses?" Linghu Chong nodded his agreement.

But Wang Jiajun didn't like the idea at all, fearing that as soon as he walked away and left his brother alone with Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong would be able to overpower his brother with ease. But if both of them went together, then of course Linghu Chong would hide the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript" and they would have no chance of finding it ever again. So he rejected.

"The search would still be the same. If you aren't afraid of the search, why use so many excuses?"

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "I agree to let you search my body only because I want to prove my innocence in front of the Master, Master-Wife, and little apprentice sister, the three of them. Whether you believe me or not, what do I care? There's no way I am going to let your filthy

claws touch my body if little apprentice sister weren't here." So he shook his head slowly.

"Just the two of you? I am afraid you are not worthy of searching me!"

The more Linghu Chong objected to the search, the more the two Wang brothers were convinced that the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript" was hidden on Linghu Chong's body. If they were able to find the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript," then firstly, they would look really good in front of their father and uncle, and secondly, they've heard that the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript" contained superior sword art techniques, and since they were the ones who found it, Cousin Lin would have no choice but to let them borrow the manuscript and take a look at it. Wang Jiajun had seen with his own eyes the other day that Linghu Chong couldn't even defend himself when the several rascals subdued him and gave him a good beating. He concluded that Linghu Chong must be only good with sword techniques, but not hand combat techniques. It would be a perfect opportunity right now when Linghu Chong had no sword in his hands. So he threw a meaningful glance at his brother before speaking to Linghu Chong again.

"Brother Linghu, better not refuse a toast only to drink a forfeit. It's not going to be a pleasant scene if we get on the wrong side of each other."

With those words, the two brothers closed in on Linghu Chong.

Suddenly, Wang Jiaju squared his shoulders and charged forward. Linghu Chong raised his arm to block. "Hey, you hit me!" Wang Jiaju yelled out loud as he locked Linghu Chong's wrist and then pushed down with his elbow. Knowing that Linghu Chong is the Head Apprentice of the Huashan Sword School, not someone to be overlooked, he applied the joint manipulation techniques of the Wang Family with all his strength.

Linghu Chong was an experienced fighter. As soon as he saw Wang Jiaju charging in like that, he knew the opponent was all hostile. He had many different counter attacks in mind with this block. When the opponent locked his wrist, he could have turned his arm over and thrust it down in an angle to launch his counter-attack, but because he had lost all his inner strength and even though he executed the technique the right way, there was no strength behind it. He felt a tingle from the joint on his right arm and then heard a crack. Wang Jiaju had broken his right elbow. Excruciating pain immediately consumed him.

Wang Jiaju was quite ruthless. As soon as he broke Linghu Chong's right arm with a push, he threw a claw hand and dislocated Linghu Chong's shoulder immediately after.

"Brother, quick! Search him!" he shouted.

Kneeling down on Linghu Chong's legs with his left leg to prevent Linghu Chong from throwing any kicks, Wang Jiajun reached into Linghu Chong's chest pocket and began to empty it. Suddenly, his hand came to contact with a thin booklet. He took it out quickly.

"Here it is! Here it is! Here's Uncle Lin's 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'!"

The two brothers flipped the booklet open in a rash. There were three words written on the first page in ancient scripts<sup>14</sup> – Smiling Proud Wanderer. The Wang brothers were only roughly literate. If those words had been written in normal script, they would have recognized them. But since they were all in ancient scripts, they had no clue. Flipping to the next page, they saw even stranger symbols and characters all over the page. They didn't know that those were actually symbols and characters for music scores, and since they had assumed that this was none other than the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript," by now, all their suspicious had been cleared away.

"Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript! Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript!" the two brothers shouted in unison.



"Let's show it to Father," Wang Jiajun suggested. He took the booklet and ran out.

"You shameless thief!" Wang Jiaju cursed as he kicked Linghu Chong in the waist heavily. After spitting on Linghu Chong's face, he also ran out of the room.

At first, Linghu Chong felt as if his chest was going to explode from the unbearable fury. But then he thought, "Those two brats are simply idiots. Their grandfather and father can't be so stupid. When they find out that this is only a music score, for sure they would come to apologize." Waves of pain came from his dislocated shoulder and elbow. He couldn't help but groan. "I've lost all my inner strength, and can't even defend myself against punks and rascals off the street. I am a good-for-nothing now. What's the point of staying alive in this world, then?"

He lay on the bed, sweating in pain. Tears streamed down as he grieved over himself. But remembering that the Wang brothers must be returning soon, he wiped off his tears so that he wouldn't show a sign of weakness.

After a long while, sound of footsteps rose. The Wang brothers rushed back in a hurry.

"Go see my grandpa," Wang Jiajun said with a sneer.

"No way!" Linghu Chong rebuffed angrily. "Your grandpa should have come here to apologize to me. Why should I go see him?"

The Wang brothers burst into loud laughter.

"My grandpa apologizes to you? Dream on! Let's go!" Wang Jiaju scoffed.

The two brothers grabbed onto Linghu Chong's robe, picked him off the bed, and carried him out.

"Your Golden Blade Wang Family still calls yourself chivalrous? You are arrogant and conceited, despicable and shameless," Linghu Chong cursed.

Wang Jiajun slapped Linghu Chong with a backhand, which bruised Linghu Chong's face and blood started dripping down his lips. But Linghu Chong kept on cursing

while the Wang brothers carried him all the way into the Back Hall.

Wang Yuanba and the Yue Buqun couple had been waiting in the Back Hall. Wang Bofen and Wang Zhongqiang also sat by Wang Yuanba. But that didn't keep Linghu Chong from spilling profanities non-stop.

"Golden Blade Wang Family, what a shameless and contemptible family. I've never seen a family so low and dirty in the entire Martial World!"

"Chong, shut up!" Yue Buqun yelled with a stern face.

Hearing his Master's rebuke, Linghu Chong finally stopped cursing, but he still glared at Wang Yuanba with angry eyes.

Holding the music score booklet in his hand, Wang Yuanba asked casually, "Nephew Linghu, where did you get this 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?"

Raising his head high, Linghu Chong laughed out loud.

"Chong, when a senior asks you a question, you answer to the best knowledge of yours. How dare you to be so rude? Where are your manners?" Yue Buqun admonished.

"Master," Linghu Chong answered, "because of my internal wounds, I have no strength left in me. And look how those two brats have treated me? Humph, is this how a guest should be treated?"

"Our Wang Family would never dare offend a good friend or a noble guest," Wang Zhongqiang replied. "But you have failed the trust from a dying man and pocketed the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' to be your own. That's the act of a thief. The Golden Blade Wang Family in Luoyang is an honest family. How can we still treat you like a friend?"

"All three generations of your Wang Family keep on saying that this is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' Have you ever seen the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' before? How are you so sure that this is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?" Linghu Chong challenged.

Wang Zhongqiang dazed for a second before replying, "This booklet was found on you, and apprentice brother Yue also confirmed that this is not a martial arts manuscript of the Huashan Sword School, then how can it not be the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?"

Fuming with anger, Linghu Chong couldn't help but laugh. "If you claim that this is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' then 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' it is! I wish your Golden Blade Wang Family will have a wonderful time learning the techniques and master the invincible sword arts. From now on, your Wang Family in Luoyang can be called the Ultimate Blade and Sword! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

"Nephew Linghu," Wang Yuanba said, "please don't take offense on what my grandchildren did to you. Everyone makes mistakes. As long as one will admit his mistake and correct himself, he will still be treated with respect. Since you have already given out the sword arts manuscript, just for the sake of your Master, I will not investigate any further. Starting from today, no one will ever mention this incident again. Why don't I put your dislocated shoulder and elbow back, first." At that word, he stood up and walked toward Linghu Chong and reached for Linghu Chong's left hand.

"Hold it! I don't need you to play up to me," Linghu Chong snapped, taking two abrupt steps back.

"What playing up to you?" Wang Yuanba was stunned.

"I am not a puppet. So you just break my arm when you feel like it and put it back when you change your mind?" Linghu Chong growled. He walked a few steps to the left until he was in front of Madam Yue and then called out, "Master-Wife!"

Madam Yue heaved a sigh and then put his dislocated joints back to place.

"Master-Wife, this clearly is a music score booklet for zither and flute. These people of the Wang Family are totally illiterate and insist on saying that it is the 'Evil-Resisting

Sword Manuscript.' What a big joke!" Linghu Chong explained.

"Grandmaster Wang, is it alright if I take a look at this booklet?" Madam Yue said to Wang Yuanba.

"Ah, here you go, Madam Yue." Wang Yuanba handed the booklet over.

After flipping through several pages and browsing through, Madam Yue herself had no clue as to what this booklet was about.

"I can't read music scores myself, though I have seen sword art manuscripts before. This booklet really doesn't look like a sword art manuscript. Grandmaster Wang, is there anyone in your house that knows how to play zither or flute? We might as well ask him to take a look, then we would know for sure," Madam Yue suggested.

Wang Yuanba hesitated, afraid that if this really were just a music score booklet, how embarrassing it would be. So he didn't answer right away. Wang Jiaju, on the other hand, was a total blockhead, and shouted in a loud voice.

"Grandpa, our accountant, Mr. Yi can play the flute. We can ask him to take a look at this. This clearly is the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' How can it be a music score booklet?"

"There are many types of martial arts manuscripts. Some people would intentionally write martial arts formulas or techniques in the form of a music score in order to keep it a secret so others wouldn't be able to pry about. That's not at all surprising," Wang Yuanba immediately added.

"If this mister in your house knows how to play the flute, then he would be able to tell if this really is a sword arts manuscript or a music score for flute," Madam Yue insisted.

Having no other choice, Wang Yuanba asked Wang Jiaju to get Mr. Yi, the accountant of the house. Soon he came back together with Mr. Yi.

Mr. Yi was a thin and short man in his fifties. He had a sparse goatee on his chin, but his clothing looked neat and

clean.

“Mr. Yi, will you please take a look at this booklet and tell us if it’s an ordinary zither score or flute score?” Wang Yuanba asked.

Mr. Yi opened the zither portion of the booklet and glanced over a couple of pages. “Sorry, I don’t know much about this part.” He shook his head.

He quickly skimmed to the flute portion of the booklet, and suddenly his eyes brightened as he started humming along the music score in a low voice and drumming two of his fingers on the table simultaneously. After a while, he shook his head again.

“This can’t be right!”

He continued humming alone, but suddenly the pitch of his voice went very high, and only seconds later, it dropped very low.

“This is impossible! Well...well...I really don’t understand this,” he muttered with a frown.

“Is there anything suspicious about this booklet? Is it very different from an ordinary music score?” Wang Yuba asked with a happy face.

“Oh Master, please look here.” Mr. Yi pointed at the flute score. “This is the Gong major<sup>15</sup> here, but it suddenly turned into the Wei minor. That’s totally against musical theories, and it would be impossible for a flute to play. Then from here it suddenly turned into the Jiao major. That’s something I’ve never seen before. It’s simply impossible to play such music using a flute.”

“Humph, you don’t know how to play it doesn’t mean others don’t know how to play it!” Linghu Chong sneered.

“You’re absolutely right!” Mr. Yi nodded. “But if someone is able to play music like this, I would sincerely admire him from the very bottom of my heart! Certainly the very bottom of my heart! Unless...unless it is he in the East Town....”

“You said that this is no ordinary flute score, and some of the tones are impossible to play using a flute, right?” Wang

Yuanba cut him off.

“Ah, yes! Definitely not ordinary! Definitely not ordinary! I will never be able to play something like that. Unless it is he in the East Town....” Mr. Yi nodded.

“Which great musician in the East Town can play this music?” Madam Yue asked.

“Well...I can’t guarantee it, but...but there’s this Elder Bamboo-Green from the East Town who can play both the zither and the flute,” Mr. Yi answered. “Maybe he can play it. His skills in playing the flute are way better than mine. Way better indeed! We are not even talking about the same league here! Certainly not the same league!”

“If this is no ordinary music score for flute, then there must be more behind it,” Wang Yuanba said.

Wang Bofen had been listening quietly by the side. He suddenly cut in, “Father, isn’t the Four Ways Six Harmonies Knife Form of the Eight Diagrams Knife Dojo in Zhengzhou also recorded in a music score?”

Wang Yuanba immediately understood. He knew that his son was just making things up. The family of the Eight Diagrams Knife Dojo Head Master, Mo Xing, had been in-laws with the Wang Family for generations. Their Dojo didn’t have anything named the Four Ways Six Harmonies Knife Form. But he figured that since the Huashan Sword School only focused in sword arts, whether another school had this knife form or not, Yue Buqun most probably wouldn’t have known, even though Yue Buqun had good knowledge of the Martial World. So he nodded.

“That’s right! That’s right! In-law Mo certainly mentioned about it several years back. Recording knife arts or sword arts in music scores is nothing unusual at all.”

“Since it’s nothing unusual at all, then would you, Grandmaster Wang, enlighten me and tell me what exactly are recorded in these two music scores?” Linghu Chong asked with a smirk.

"That...Alas, my son-in-law had passed away, therefore, other than you, I am afraid there's not another one who would be able to understand the secret in the music score." Wang Yuanba heaved a long sigh.

If Linghu Chong had wanted to plead innocent, he could have simply told the origin of the "Smiling Proud Wanderer" music score, but then inevitably, he would have to mention about how the Hengshan Sword School's Great Mr. Mo had killed Great Songyang Palm Fei Bin, and that would certainly bring severe consequences; also, once Master found out that the music score was really related to the Demon Cult Elder Qu Yang, for sure Master would have it destroyed right away, then he would not be able to fulfill his promise to the dead. With these in his mind, he held his anger and responded calmly.

"Since this Mr. Yi mentioned that there's an Elder Bamboo-Green who is an expert in music, why don't we take the music score over to let him examine it?"

"That Elder Bamboo-Green is a weirdo who acts like a mad man. How can we believe any word out of his mouth?" Wang Yuanba shook his head.

"But we must get to the bottom of this matter," Madam Yue replied. "Chong is our apprentice and Pingzhi is also our apprentice. We can't grant favor to either side. To find out who's right and who's wrong, we might as well ask that Elder Bamboo-Green to give a judgment." She didn't want to say that this was a dispute between Linghu Chong and the Golden Blade Wang Family, so she conveniently replaced the Wang Family with Lin Pingzhi.

"Mr. Yi, would you please send a wagon for this Elder Bamboo-Green?" Madam Yue requested.

"Well, this old gentleman is a very eccentric folk. When people ask him for favors, if it's something that he doesn't care, he won't pay any attention to it even if you kowtow to him at his door. But if he decides to intervene, you can't even push him away," Mr. Yi replied.

“That sounds just like us martial people,” Madam Yue nodded. “I suppose this Elder Bamboo-Green must be a senior master in the martial arts society. Senior apprentice brother, we have certainly been really ignorant.”

“That Elder Bamboo-Green is merely a craftsman skilled in making baskets and floor mats with bamboo strips. He is no martial master,” Wang Yuanba replied with a smirk. “He plays the zither and the flute well and also paints pictures of bamboos. Many people buy his paintings. He is just an old craftsman posing as a lover of art, and does attract a certain local crowd.”

“It would be a pity if we don’t pay a visit to such a figure while we are in Luoyang. Grandmaster Wang, would you please be kind enough to accompany us and pay a visit to such an elegant craftsman?” Madam Yue asked.

Seeing that Madam Yue was quite determined to go, Wang Yuanba had to agree. So led by Mr. Yi, Wang Yuanba, his sons and grandsons set out for the East Town with the Yue Buqun couple, Linghu Chong, Lin Pingzhi, Yue Lingshan, and other Huashan apprentices.

The group went through several small streets and came upon a very narrow alley. A large bush of bamboos occupied the end of the ally. Swaying gently in the breeze, they set an elegant tone to the surroundings. As soon as the group stepped into the alley, dim sound of zither play echoed in their ears pleasantly – someone was playing a song. The alley appeared to be so refreshing and peaceful that it almost seemed as if this was an entirely different world totally isolated from the crowded city outside.

“This Elder Bamboo-Green certainly knows how to enjoy life!” Madam Yue whispered.

Suddenly, a clank echoed as one of the zither strings snapped, and the zither play halted abruptly.

“Respectful guests have arrived at my humble shack. Is there something you want to see me about?” an old voice rose from inside.



“Elder, we have this odd zither and flute music score. Would you be kind enough to examine it for us?” Mr. Yi announced.

“You have a zither and flute music score and want me to examine it? Ha-ha, you really flatter an old craftsman,” Elder Bamboo-Green answered.

Before Mr. Yi even had a chance to respond, Wang Jiaju had already shouted out, “Grandmaster Wang from the Gold Blade Wang Family is here to visit.”

He had thought that because his grandfather was a very important figure in the city of Luoyang, as soon as he mentioned his grandfather’s name, the old craftsman would for sure rush out to greet them, but all he got in return were Elder Bamboo-Green’s sneers.

“Golden Blade or Silver Blade, it’s no better than the old craftsman’s rusty iron blade. An old craftsman doesn’t need to visit Master Wang, and there’s no need for Master Wang to visit an old craftsman, either.”

Wang Jiaju was infuriated. “Grandpa, this old craftsman is a moron with no manners. We don’t need to see him. Let’s go home,” he said loudly.

“Since we are already here, we might as well ask Elder Bamboo-Green to take a look at the music score,” Madam Yue insisted.

“Hmm!” Wang Yuanba snorted as he handed the music score booklet to Mr. Yi, who, in turn, took the booklet and walked behind the bush of bamboos.

“You can put it down here,” Elder Bamboo-Green’s voice rose from inside.

“Elder, is this a real music score or some kind of secret martial arts manuscript with formulas and techniques written in disguise in the form of a music score?” Mr. Yi asked.

“Secret martial arts manuscripts? Are you out of your mind? Of course this is a music score!” Elder Bamboo-Green reproached, and moments later, sound of zither rose again, graceful and pleasant.

Linghu Chong listened to the music and soon remembered the melody – the same melody Liu Zhengfeng had played that day. The music was the same, but the previous player had long perished. Linghu Chong couldn't help but feel mournful.

Not far into the music, the pitch of the zither sound suddenly went higher and higher until it almost sounded like a shrill whistle. Clank, one of the zither strings snapped. And as the sound went even higher, another clank echoed when another string snapped. Elder Bamboo-Green uttered a cry of surprise.

"This zither score is really odd. I don't understand."

Wang Yuanba and his two sons and two grandsons exchanged looks among themselves, all looking content and triumphant.

"Let me try the flute score," Elder Bamboo-Green muttered, and soon the sound of a flute rose from behind the bamboo bush.

At the beginning, the flute sounded melodious and pleasant, depicting a romantic scene. But then the pitches of the flute sound turned lower and lower till it was almost impossible to recognize. And after several more notes, the sound became hoarse, and turned into very unpleasant noises.

Elder Bamboo-Green heaved a sigh. "Little brother Yi, you play the flute yourself. Don't you know it's impossible to play anything with such a low pitch? The zither score and the flute score aren't necessarily fakes, but the composer is certainly being deliberately mystifying, and perhaps is playing jokes on us. Why don't you go home first and let me ponder over this a bit more?"

"Sure!" Mr. Yi answered and then walked out from behind the bamboo bush.

"Where's the sword arts manuscript?" Wang Zhongqiang asked.

"Sword arts manuscript? Oh, Elder Bamboo-Green wants to keep it for a while so he can ponder over it some more," Mr. Yi answered.

"Go get it back, quick! This is an invaluable sword arts manuscript. Do you have any idea how many people in the Martial World want to get their hands onto this? How can we leave it in the hands of someone totally irrelevant?" Wang Zhongqiang admonished hurriedly.

"Ah, alright!" Mr. Yi replied and turned around to head back toward the back of the bamboo bush, again, when Elder Bamboo-Green's voice suddenly rose again.

"Auntie, why have you come out?"

"How old is the Elder Bamboo-Green?" Wang Yuanba asked in a whisper.

"In his seventies. Close to eighty years old I guess," Mr. Yi answered.

"If an eighty-year old man still called her his auntie, then this old granny had to be at least a hundred years old," everybody thought of the same thing.

A woman's voice acknowledged with a muffled "hmm."

"Auntie, please take a look at this. This music score is very strange," Elder Bamboo-Green explained.

The woman acknowledged again with a muffled "hmm." Then sound of strings being plucked rose. Apparently someone was tuning the zither. Then it fell quiet for a moment as the snapped strings were probably being replaced with new ones. After some more tuning sounds, the granny started playing. At the beginning, it sounded the same as how Elder Bamboo-Green had played. Then the pitch of the zither sound went higher and higher, but this time it somehow transformed into a higher scale smoothly and pleasantly as if it were never difficult to start with.

Linghu Chong was half surprised and half joyous. He could vaguely remember that this was exactly the same melody he had heard Qu Yang play that night. The melody sometimes sounded impassionate and moving yet sometimes

turned elegant and gentle. Although Linghu Chong didn't know anything about music, he could still tell that the artistic conception this granny had interpreted was quite different from what Qu Yang had interpreted, even though they were playing the exact same melody. The granny's play sounded placid and gentle, making the listeners truly appreciate the exquisiteness of good music, but it lacked the exciting surges Qu Yang's play was able to bring out. After a long while, the music gradually slowed down as if the music was drifting further and further away, and the zither player had slowly walked away, hundreds of feet, and then miles away. The notes became so subtle that it simply faded into the gentle breeze.

Just when the sound of the zither was about to fade away, a couple of very low and delicate flute sounds rose next to the sound of the zither. The sweet sound of the flute circled in the air and turned louder and louder, as if the flute player had walked closer and closer, while playing the flute continuously. The sound was clear and melodious, sometimes high and sometimes low, sometimes gentle and sometimes loud. When everyone thought that the sound was already at its lowest, after some twirls, it would turn even lower. Although subtle and mild to the extreme, every syllable was still clearly recognizable.

Gradually, some high-pitched notes would occasionally break out from the low-pitched melody, like pearls falling into a jade plate and bounced back and forth, short and brisk, as one fell down, another one would bounce back. Then more and more sounds joined and echoed each other. First, it was like a spring streaming down the mountain path, echoing as the little waves splashed over the narrow banks. Then it turned into a garden full of colorful flowers, each blossoming so vividly in a competition to earn a glance from the dancing butterfly. There was also the choir from the many kinds of birds, echoing each other here and there, praising the efforts of the various blossoms, and singing joyously about the

beauty of the season. Then gradually, the many birds flew away one after another as the spring season quietly stepped away and the petals from the withered blossoms swirled in the air, performing their sad dance falling toward the ground. Then the rain came, which painted everything in a color of gloom and made the leaves rustle. It was now cold and dreary and lifeless. All there left was the drizzle now, so tiny that no one could tell when it went from on to off and then from off to on again. And finally, everything fell into an ultimate silence.

Only a long while after the flute had stopped playing did everyone realize the silence. All felt as if they had just come out of a dream. Although Wang Yuanba, Yue Buqun and the many others didn't know much about music, they all found themselves deeply intoxicated by the magic of the music. And Mr. Yi simply froze there in a trance, as if his soul had faded together with the music and was no longer inside his body.

Madam Yue heaved a sigh in great admiration. "Admirable! Very admirable! Chong, what's the name of the music?"

"It's called the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song," Linghu Chong answered. "This granny has such incredible skills, and it is even rarer that someone could have such supreme skills in both zither and flute."

"The composer certainly did a fantastic job writing the music, but it sure takes someone like this granny with such superb skills to be able to bring the best out of it. It must be the first time for you to listen to such wonderful melody," Madam Yue remarked.

"Actually, no! Last time when I heard it, it sounded even more spectacular," Linghu Chong replied.

"Really? How can there be anyone with even better zither and flute skills than that granny?" Madam Yue asked in surprise.

“Not necessarily better than this granny. But when I heard such wonderful music the last time, there were two players. One played the zither and the other one played the flute, and they were also playing this ‘Smiling Proud Wanderer’ song....”

Before he even finished his sentence, three plucking sounds came from behind the bamboo bush as the granny whispered something in a very low voice. Vaguely, it sounded like that she had said, “Zither and flute playing together? Where can I ever find the other one?”

Elder Bamboo-Green’s voice rose again, loud and clear. “Mr. Yi, this is indeed a music score. My auntie has just played it. You can take it back now.”

“Yes.” Mr. Yi replied. He stepped behind the bamboo bush and soon returned, holding the music score booklet with both hands.

“Such fine work of art as this one recorded in the booklet is very rare and very hard to come by. Such wonder should never fall into the hands of vulgar people. And you should never have the wishful thinking of studying this music piece recklessly. It would only cause you more harm than gain,” Elder Bamboo-Green added.

“Yes, yes! I would never even dare!” Mr. Yi replied sincerely, and then handed the music score booklet back to Wang Yuanba.

Wang Yuanba had heard the spectacular performance himself and knew that it couldn’t have been a fake. Returning the booklet back to Linghu Chong, he said in an awkward tone,

“Nephew Linghu, we are truly very sorry!”

Linghu Chong answered with a sneer and was just about to add some satirical words when he saw Madam Yue shaking her head at him, so he swallowed them back down.

Feeling so embarrassed, Wang Yuanba, his two sons, and the two grandsons left before everyone else. Yue Buqun and the many apprentices also followed. But Linghu Chong

remained. Holding the music score booklet in his hands, he stood there like a statue.

"Chong, aren't you going back now?" Madam Yue asked.

"I just want to stay here a bit longer," Linghu Chong answered.

"Don't be too late. Go back and take a good rest. Oh, be careful with your arms. They were dislocated pretty badly. Don't try anything heavy." Madam Yue exhorted.

"I got it!" Linghu Chong replied.

After the group left, the small alley was quiet, once again. The only occasional sound breaking the silence were the rustling of the bamboo leaves in the gentle breeze. Staring at the music score in his hands, Linghu Chong remembered how Liu Zhengfeng and Qu Yang had performed the music together in that late night.

"The two of them were so lucky to have found their intimate friendship in each other and composed such a wonderful piece together," he thought to himself. "Even though the granny behind the bamboo bush has incredible skills in playing both the zither and the flute, she could only play the two parts separately. The Elder Bamboo-Green couldn't play the music together with her. Maybe this 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song written for a zither and a flute to play together would perish forever and I would never have the opportunity to hear it ever again."

His mind fell blank for a little while before he thought again, "Uncle-Master Liu and Elder Qu, one was a senior master of the Chivalrous Side while the other was an Elder of the Demon Cult. One represented righteousness while the other one represented evil. They should have been completely irreconcilable. But when they talked music to each other, they could feel each other's heart and ended up becoming bosom friends. They were also able to compose such a magnificent and spectacular piece of 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song together. When the two of them left this world together, hand in hand, there were really no regrets in

their hearts. That was so much better than what I have to endure right now, living a lonely life in this world, suspected by my Master, forsaken by my little apprentice sister, while the only apprentice brother who respected me and loved me died in my own hands." His heart was swelled by grief and sorrow. Tears ran across his cheeks and dripped onto the music score booklet. Linghu Chong couldn't help but choke with sobs.

Elder Bamboo-Green's voice came from behind the bamboo bush again, "Friend, may I ask why you are crying?"

"Oh, I just grieved about my own life experiences besides remembering how the two senior masters, who composed this music piece, passed away. I must have forgotten myself. I am so sorry. It's my fault that I have disturbed your peace," Linghu Chong answered. After these words, he turned around to leave.

"Little friend, would you please step in here and have a word with an old man? I'd like to consult you on a few questions," Elder Bamboo-Green invited.

That caught Linghu Chong in a bit of surprise. He had seen the arrogant attitude the Elder Bamboo-Green put on display toward Wang Yuanba, and didn't expect such courtesy toward him, a nobody, at all.

"You flatter me. Anything Elder wishes to ask about, I will answer to the best of my knowledge," he answered, and then walked through the bush of bamboo.

What came to his eyes were five small cabins, two on the left, and three on the right, all made out of thick bamboo poles. An old man strolled out from a cabin on the left with a bright smile on his face.

"Little friend, please come in and join me for some tea."

Linghu Chong took a good look at the Elder Bamboo-Green. The old man's back was a little bit hunchbacked. His head was almost bald. All there left were patches of sparse hair. He had big hands and big feet, yet looking hale and hearty.



“Linghu Chong here pays his respect to an elder.” Linghu Chong bowed to salute.

“I’ve only wasted more years of my life. That’s all. Come in! Come in! Make yourself at home.” Elder Bamboo-Green smiled.

Linghu Chong followed him into the small cabin. The furniture inside was all made out of bamboos. A painting of a bamboo bush hung by the wall. The strokes in the painting flowed freely. Together with the many dripping ink spots in shape of bamboo leaves, the bamboo bush looked thick and dense. A zither and a flute lay on the table.

Elder Bamboo-Green poured out some dark green tea from a pottery teapot and filled a bowl. “Please have some tea,” he invited.

Linghu Chong took the tea bowl with both hands and bowed slightly.

“Little friend, would you be kind enough to tell me how you ended up with this music score booklet?” Elder Bamboo-Green asked.

At those words, Linghu Chong’s heart skipped a beat. The story of the music score contained many secrets. That was why he didn’t even tell his Master and Master-Wife. But that day when Liu Zhengfeng and Qu Yang gave him the music score, they had intended to leave this music piece behind so it would not perish with them. The Elder Bamboo-Green and his aunt both had excellent understanding of music, and furthermore, his aunt had shown superior skills and understanding in the music piece. The two of them were quite old, but other than these two, where in the world would he be able to find a third one who would be worthy of receiving this music score? Even though there might be someone else in the world that would be an expert in music, since Linghu Chong wouldn’t be living for long, the chances of find that person would be very slim. With these thoughts, Linghu Chong pondered over it for a short while and then answered,

“The two senior masters who composed this music piece, one had superior skills in playing the zither, and the other one had excellent skills in playing the flute. The two of them became bosom friends and wrote this music piece together. But it was so unfortunate that disaster came upon them and they left the world at the same time. Right before they passed away, the two senior masters gave the music score to me and asked me to find the right person to pass it onto, so the music piece would not perish together with them.” He paused for a second and then continued. “Earlier, when I heard Elder’s aunt demonstrating her superior skills in both zither and flute, I was so relieved that I’ve finally met the destined owner of this music score booklet. Elder, please take the music score booklet and give it to the granny, so I can fulfill my promise to the two composers and comfort their souls in the underworld.” At that word, he held the music score up with both of his hands respectfully.

But Elder Bamboo-Green didn’t take it. “Please allow me to ask my auntie first,” he said. “I don’t know if she is willing to accept it.”

The granny’s voice rose from the little cabin on the left, “Mister Linghu is too kind to have presented us with such a wonderful gift, showing his vast generosity. It would be disrespectful to decline yet embarrassing to accept. Would you be kind enough to enlighten us with the names of those two senior masters who composed this excellent piece?” Strangely, her voice didn’t sound old in any way.

“Certainly,” Linghu Chong answered. “The two senior masters who wrote this, one was Uncle-Master Liu Zhengfeng, and the other one was Elder Qu Yang.”

The granny uttered a cry of surprise. “So it was them,” she murmured.

“Do you know them?” Linghu Chong asked.

The granny didn’t answer his question and kept her silence instead. Only after a good while, she spoke again.

“Liu Zhengfeng was an elite master in the Hengshan Sword School, but Qu Yang was an Elder of the Demon Cult. The two sides have been bitter enemies for generations. What had made them compose this piece together? I am really lost now.”

Even though Linghu Chong hadn't even met the granny face to face, from her performance of the zither and flute, he was already convinced that she was an old, kind, and wise lady aloof from any of the worldly affairs, someone who would never lie to him or sell him out. If she was able to tell who Liu and Qu were, then obviously she was a fellow martial arts master. So he told her everything from the beginning to the end truthfully: how Liu Zhengfeng planned to quit at the Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony, how Chief Zuo of the Songshan Sword School sent his Command Flag to stop the event, how Liu and Qu were hit by Songshan School elite fighter's palm strike, how they performed the music together in the remote valley, and how the two asked him to find the right person to pass on the music piece before they passed away. The only thing he omitted was the part when Great Mr. Mo slain Fei Bin.

The granny listened quietly. After Linghu Chong finished telling the story, she asked, “This is clearly a music score. Why did Golden Blade Wang Yuanba claim that it was a martial arts manuscript?”

Linghu Chong then told the part about how the Lin Zhennan couple was fatally wounded by the Qingcheng Sword School and Yu Canghai, how they had asked him to take their last words to Lin Pingzhi, and how the Wang brothers suspected him and etc.

“I see,” the granny responded. “You could have told your Master and Master-Wife everything, the reasons and causes. Wouldn't that have saved you a lot of trouble and kept all these meaningless suspicions off your back? I am only a stranger. Why have you told me everything without reservation?” she inquired again after a short pause.

"I don't quite understand it myself. I guess it's because I was deeply moved by your high demeanor after listening to your graceful performance and didn't feel suspicious about you," Linghu Chong answered sincerely.

"Then are you saying that you actually felt suspicious about your Master and Master-Wife?" the granny asked.

Linghu Chong felt a shock in his heart. "I dare not. It's only that...in my Master's heart, he suspects me a great deal. Alas, I can't really blame that on my respectful Master."

"From the sound of your voice, I can tell that you lack a solid foundation of inner strength. That shouldn't have happened to a young man in your age. Why's that? Have you recently fallen seriously ill or gotten wounded badly?"

"I did get wounded badly."

"Nephew Bamboo-Green, will you please bring this young man to my window so I can check his pulses?"

"Sure!" Elder Bamboo-Green answered. He led Linghu Chong to the window by the little cabin on the left side, and then asked him to put his left hand into the window through the window screen made out of thin bamboo sections. Inside the bamboo screen there was another layer of thin gauze. Linghu Chong could only vaguely see the shape of a person, but none of the face. Then he felt three ice-cold fingers touching his wrist. The granny started checking his pulse.<sup>16</sup> But only a short moment later, she cried out in surprise.

"This is very odd!" A few moments passed before she spoke again, "Your right hand please."

After the checking was completed, she fell into dead silence.

"Senior master, there's no need to worry about me. I know my life won't last for too long. I really don't give much thought about it," Linghu Chong said with a slight smile.

"Why are you saying that your life won't last long?" the granny asked.

"I accidentally killed my junior apprentice brother and also lost my Master's 'Divine Art of the Violet Twilight

Manuscript.' I only hope that I will be able to find the manuscript soon to return it to my Master. After that, I will commit suicide in exchange for my apprentice brother's forgiveness."

"Divine Art of the Violet Twilight Manuscript? That's nothing extraordinary. How did you accidentally kill your apprentice brother?"

Linghu Chong then told the story about how the Peach Valley's Six Fairies tried to heal his wounds, how the six energy streams clashed and smashed against each other inside him, how his little apprentice sister stole Master's invaluable manuscript for him to heal himself, how he refused to read it and apprentice brother Lu Dayou decided to read for him against his will, how he sealed Lu Dayou's acupoints, and how he must have used too much strength in sealing those acupoints and got Lu Dayou killed.

"Your apprentice brother didn't die off your hands," the granny concluded after listening to the entire story.

"He didn't die off my hands?" Linghu Chong was stunned.

"Your inner strength was not pure. Just by sealing those two acupoints, you wouldn't be able to kill him. Somebody else killed your apprentice brother," the granny said firmly.

"Who killed apprentice brother Lu, then?" Linghu Chong murmured.

"It's not necessary that the one who stole the manuscript is the murderer, himself, but at least the two must have some kind of connection," the granny said.

Linghu Chong heaved out a deep breath, feeling so relieved as if a huge rock had just been removed from his chest. He had asked himself the same question before. How could he have killed Lu Dayou by jabbing his two acupoints so lightly? But deep in his heart he had always thought that even if Lu Dayou wasn't killed from his jabs, Lu still died for his sake. How can a true man shirk responsibility, shift the blame onto others, and find excuses for himself? During the

past many days, he had seen again and again the intimate relationship between Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi. Out of disappointment and despair, he had really lost his will to live. There was only one thing on his mind, and that was to die and leave this world once and for all. But now when the granny reminded him, anger swelled in his heart.

“Revenge! Revenge! I must seek revenge for apprentice brother Lu!” he thought to himself

“You said that there were six energy streams clashing inside you, but based on what I read from your pulse, there seemed to have eight energy streams. May I ask why?” the granny asked.

In loud laughter, Linghu Chong told her how Monk No Commandment had worked on mending his wounds as well.

“You have a sanguine disposition. Even though your pulses are in disorder, they showed no sign of prostration. Would you care to listen to another zither music?” the granny suggested.

“You are too kind. I truly appreciate it,” Linghu Chong replied.

Soon, music rose again, but this time the melody was ultimately mild and tender, like the sound of a slight sigh, the tender petals of blossoms moistened by the silent morning dew, or the morning breeze, stroking the many hanging twigs of the willow tree. Not long into it, Linghu Chong felt as if his eyelids had grown heavier and heavier. He kept reminding himself, “I can’t doze off. I am listening to a senior master playing the zither. If I doze off, that would be so disrespectful.” But as hard as he tried to stay focused, the drowsiness simply was irresistible. Before long, his eyes were closed. He lay on the ground and fell asleep. Even in his sleep, the soft and gentle music echoed vaguely in his dreams. It almost felt as if a gentle hand was caressing his hair with love and caring, and he had gone back to his childhood, resting in Master-Wife’s arms, and enjoying her tender affection. A good while passed before the sound of the

zither finally quieted down. Waking up abruptly, Linghu Chong stood up hurriedly, looking very embarrassed.

“Oh, no! I am so sorry that I was so impolite to have fallen asleep while listening to your wonderful play! This is so embarrassing,” he muttered.

“Don’t blame yourself. I intentionally played that music to lull you into sleep, hoping the music would be able to put the energy streams inside you in order. Why don’t you try to channel your inner strength and see if the feeling of nausea has lessened?” the granny suggested.

“Many thanks!” Linghu Chong replied.

Feeling very delighted, he sat down on the ground with his legs crossed and started to channel his inner energy. He could feel that those eight energy streams still charged about inside him, clashing against each other, but that strong feeling of nausea at his chest did lessen quite a bit. He worked some more, trying to gather some inner strength, but only felt dizzy and dizzy. Suddenly, his body collapsed to the side. Elder Bamboo-Green hurried forth to prop him up and then walked him back inside the cabin.

“The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies and Great Master No Commandment all had resourceful inner energy. The energy streams they planted are too strong to be messed with from my shallow music play. I am very sorry to have put you through more pain and suffering,” the granny apologized.

“You are being too modest. I have already benefited tremendously from listening to this song,” Linghu Chong replied in a hurry.

Elder Bamboo-Green picked up a writing brush. Dipping it in the black ink, he wrote on a piece of paper, “Ask about learning this song and benefit all your life.”

Linghu Chong immediately came to realization. “May I be bold enough to ask the senior master to teach me this song, so I can slowly improve my injury by myself?” he asked.

Elder Bamboo-Green nodded, looking very pleased.

The granny did not answer right away. After a moment of pause, she finally asked, "How are your zither skills? Will you please play a song?"

Linghu Chong blushed. "I have never learned how to play the zither before. I really know nothing about it. It was such a bold request for me to have even thought about learning the superior skills from you, senior master! Please excuse my presumptuous head."

"I'd better get going now," he bowed deeply toward Elder Bamboo-Green.

"Please wait. It is embarrassing that we couldn't repay the great generosity you have shown by giving us the wonderful music. It also troubles me deeply that your wounds are too severe to be cured. Nephew Bamboo-Green, you can start teaching Mister Linghu how to play the zither tomorrow. If he has enough patience and can stay in Luoyang for a period of time, then...then I might as well teach him this 'Song of Peace and Serenity'." In the last several words, her voice almost turned into a whisper, hard to pick up.

In the early morning the next day Linghu Chong came to the small cabin in the small alley for his first zither lesson. Elder Bamboo-Green took out a brown-ended zither made from the trunk of a phoenix tree and started to teach Linghu Chong basic music theories.

"There are a total of twelve majors. They are Huang-Zhong, Da-Lv, Tai-Cu, Jia-Zhong, Gu-Xi, Zhong-Lv, Rui-Bin, Lin-Zhong, Yi-Ze, Nan-Lv, Wu-Yi, and Ying-Zhong. These all came from the ancient times. Legend has it that many years ago, Huang Di<sup>17</sup> commanded Lin Lun to create scales, and Lin Lun was inspired by phoenix's singing, thus creating the twelve majors. A zither has seven strings and can play Gong, Shang, Jia, Wei, and Yu the five scales. The first string plays the Huang-Zhong major, and the third string plays the Gong scale. The five tones are Man-Jiao, Qing-Shang, Gong-Diao, Man-Gong, and Rui-Bin." He went ahead and started explaining every single one of them in details.



Although Linghu Chong had no prior knowledge of any kind about music theories, because of his natural gift, he picked everything up in a very fast pace. Very satisfied with his progress, Elder Bamboo-Green started to teach him the fingering techniques, and also taught him a short song named "Vivid Sky Melody." Linghu Chong followed the song several times and then played it on his own. Even though he missed several notes and his fingering looked jerky, the music depicted a good picture of the vast blue sky, cloudless and spacious. The granny listened in the cabin next to it. When he had finished playing, she let out a gentle sigh.

"Young Master Linghu, you have shown great talent in learning the zither. Perhaps it wouldn't be long before you can start learning the 'Song of Peace and Serenity'."

"Auntie," Elder Bamboo-Green said, "today is only little brother Linghu's first lesson in music, yet when he played the 'Vivid Sky Melody,' he was already able to portray a much better imagery than I could. Sound of the zither came directly from one's heart. I guess the reason is because he is very broad-minded indeed."

"Granny, you really flatter me," Linghu Chong replied. "I wonder when the day will come when I will be able to play the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song the way you did."

"You...you want to play the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' song?" the granny uttered.

"After hearing senior master's graceful performance yesterday, I felt great admiration. But of course it's just my wishful thinking. Even master Bamboo-Green couldn't play it, and I am far from that." Linghu Chong blushed in embarrassment.

The granny fell quiet. After a long while, she finally murmured in a very low voice, "If you can play the zither part, of course that would be great..." Her voice fell lower and lower, and then a tender sigh followed.

For the following twenty some days, Linghu Chong would always come to the bamboo cabin in the small alley to take

his zither lessons and stay till dusk before leaving. He ate all his lunches at Elder Bamboo-Green's place. Though it consisted only simple vegetables and tofu, he enjoyed it a lot more than the expensive dishes that were served in the Wang Family, especially when there were also great wines to go with the lunches everyday. Elder Bamboo-Green didn't have a great wine tolerance, but all the wine he stored were cream of the crop. He had a great knowledge about wines. Not only did he know the origins of every kind of wines, he was also able to tell the place the wine was made and the year it was made with a single sip. Linghu Chong had never heard of the many things about wine before. So he not only learned how to play the zither, but also a great deal about wines from Elder Bamboo-Green. He sometimes even felt that the theories related to wines were as deep as theories of sword arts or zither play.

Several times when Elder Bamboo-Green went out to sell handicraft arts made out of bamboos, the granny would then give him lessons behind the bamboo made screen. As days went by, many of Linghu Chong's questions regarding the zither play were so advanced that even Elder Bamboo-Green didn't know the answer and the granny had to answer them, herself.

But Linghu Chong never had a chance to see the granny's face. Her voice sounded gentle and tender, as if it was the voice of a young girl from a rich family, nothing like the voice of an elderly granny living a poor life in a shabby alley. He figured that it was probably because she had been continuously nurtured by classical music since her young age, and that was why her voice remained pleasant, just like the pleasing music she played, even in her old age.

One day, the granny taught Linghu Chong a new song named "Affectionate Thoughts." This was an ancient song from the Han Dynasty with a very sweet and melodious tone. Linghu Chong first listened to the granny playing it several times, and then tried it himself. As the music went on,

unconsciously, many memories flashed by his mind. He remembered when Yue Lingshan was still a child many years ago, how the two of them, as a pair of innocent playmates, shared so much joy and fun together. He also remembered the warm affection little apprentice sister had shown when she practiced sword arts in the waterfall with him and when she brought dinners up the “Cliff of Contemplation” for him. Then, out of nowhere, Lin Pingzhi came, and how the little apprentice sister became colder and colder toward him. Grief swelled in his heart as he played on. Suddenly, the tone changed into something else, and out came the melody of a Fujian folk song – it was none other than the folk song Yue Lingshan had sung that day when she walked down the cliff. In shock, he immediately stopped playing.

“You were doing a good job playing this ‘Affectionate Thoughts’ with much affection and good understanding of the meaning behind it. I guess you must have remembered some past events while you played. But may I ask why the tone suddenly turned into the kind of melody from the Fujian region and sounded almost like a folk song?” the granny asked in a mild tone.

Linghu Chong had always been a man of a sanguine disposition, and this was something that had smoldered in his heart for months. Feeling very grateful about how the granny had treated him so warmly and kindly for the last twenty some days, he simply couldn’t hide it to himself any longer and spilled out all about his bitter love toward Yue Lingshan. Once he started telling the story, he could no longer restrain himself, and ended up telling everything from the beginning to the end without any reservation, as if the granny had become his grandmother, or mother, or a sister. By the time he finally finished telling his story, he felt greatly embarrassed.

“Granny,” he apologized, “sorry that I just babbled on and on with these meaningless things. That is so...so....”

"Fate cannot be imposed upon. Like the old saying says, 'Everyone has his own fate, so don't envy others.' Young Master Linghu, although you've lost your present love, it is not to say that you won't find your soul mate another day," the granny replied in a gentle voice.

"I don't even know how many days I still have left in this world. I guess having a family of my own will never be my concern," Linghu Chong said loudly.

The granny did not speak another word. Sounds of zither rose again; she started playing the "Song of Peace and Serenity." Only minutes into it, Linghu Chong almost fell asleep again.

The granny stopped playing. "From now on, I will start teaching you this song. It probably will take ten days to learn the entire song. Then you can play the song every day. Even though your inner strength won't be fully recovered, more or less, it will be somewhat beneficial for you."

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered.

From that day, the granny began teaching Linghu Chong the music score and the fingering techniques. Linghu Chong put in good efforts in memorizing everything, and four days soon went by.

By the morning of the fifth day, when Linghu Chong was just about to head out to take zither lessons in the small alley, Lao Denuo walked to him in a hurry.

"Big apprentice brother, Master has given his order. We will be leaving here tomorrow."

"We are leaving tomorrow? I...I...." Linghu Chong was taken by surprise. He had wanted to say that he hadn't finished learning the zither song, but he swallowed the words back.

"Master-Wife asked you to start packing. We will be setting out in the early morning," Lao Denuo added.

Nodding his acknowledgement, Linghu Chong came to the bamboo cabin in a trot.

"I will be leaving Luoyang tomorrow," he said to the granny.

The granny was taken by surprise. After a good while of silence, she finally said gently, "Why are you in such a hurry? You...you haven't finished learning the song yet."

"I was thinking about the same thing. But this is the Master's order. Besides, we are only guests in a foreign town. We can't really live long in someone else's house," Linghu Chong answered.

"That's true," the granny answered.

That day, the granny taught Linghu Chong some more music score and fingering techniques no different from any other day.

In the many days spent together with the granny, even though Linghu Chong never saw her face, from the sound of her zither play and the dialogues between the two, he could tell that she had great care for him as if he was a member of her family. Only that she was not the kind who liked to show her enthusiasm, so occasionally when her words showed some affection, she would immediately mix it up with other things, apparently not wanting him to catch it. In this world, it used to be the Yue Buqun couple, Yue Lingshan, and Lu Dayou those four who cared the most for him, but by now Lu Dayou had passed away, Yue Lingshan cared for Lin Pingzhi whole-heartedly, instead, and Master and Master-Wife both were suspicious of him, so he naturally felt that the Elder Bamboo-Green and the granny were the closest to him. During the day, for several times he had wanted to tell Elder Bamboo-Green that he would like to stay in the small alley, studying zither and flute and also the craftsmanship instead of going back to the Huashan Sword School. But as soon as he remembered the lovely face of Yue Lingshan, he would drop the thought, not able to bare the idea of parting with his dear little apprentice sister.

"Even if the little apprentice sister stopped talking to me, all I want is to see her once everyday. I would be happy even

with just a view from her back or the sound of her few words, let alone the fact that she never stopped talking to me.”

Dusk came, and it was time for farewell. Reluctant to leave Elder Bamboo-Green and the granny, Linghu Chong walked next to the window of the granny’s cabin and knelt down to salute. Vaguely he could see that behind the bamboo screen, the granny also knelt down to salute back.

“I have taught you zither skills to repay the great favor you have granted us by giving us the music score. Young Master Linghu, why are you saluting me in such a serious manner?” the granny’s voice rose from inside the cabin.

“After our parting today, who knows when I would have the pleasure to listen to senior master’s elegant and magnificent performance? As long as I am still alive, I promise that I would come back to Luoyang once again and pay a visit to Elder and Granny,” Linghu Chong replied.

Suddenly a thought came to his mind, “The two of them are already in their final days. Who knows how many years more would they be able to last? By the time I come back to Luoyang again, they’d probably be gone from this world. Alas, life is almost like a dream, hard to tell what’s real and what’s illusory. It is also like a morning dewdrop, so insignificant, so pretty, yet so brief.” At those thoughts, he choked with sobs.

“Young Master Linghu, at the moment of parting, I have an advice for you,” the granny said.

“Yes, please bestow your wisdom upon me. I will keep it to my heart,” Linghu Chong answered.

But for a long while, the granny kept her silence. After another long while, she finally spoke again in her gentle voice, “Ominous, the Martial World is. Do take good care!”

“I got it!” Linghu Chong replied as a feeling of sadness swelled in his heart.

He bowed his farewell to Elder Bamboo-Green as sound of zither rose again from the small cabin on the left, and the

music played was none other than that ancient tone – “Affectionate Thoughts.”

The next day, Yue Buqun and the rest of the group bid their farewell to Wang Yuanba and his two sons. The plan was to go north by boat following the Luo River. Wang Yuanba, his two sons, and his two grandsons came all the way to the wharf to see their guest off. Servants brought onto the boat trays of silver ingots piled high – presents from the Wang Family as travel expenses. A sumptuous feast was also catered along the pier for the farewell party.

Ever since that day when the Wang Jiajun and Wang Jiaju brothers broke Linghu Chong’s arms, Linghu Chong never spoke to any one in the Wang Family ever again. At the moment of parting, he simply turned the whites of his eyes up and stared blankly toward the five members of the Wang Family as if the “Wang Family” didn’t even exist.

Yue Buqun almost got a headache because of this Head Apprentice of his. He knew that Linghu Chong was a stubborn young man. If he had forced Linghu Chong to salute Wang Yuanba for the farewell, at the current moment, he probably would bend to Master’s order and give in, but afterwards, he would most probably cause a great deal of trouble for the Wang Family and create many disturbances. That was why he thanked Wang Yuanba again and again, himself, and pretended that he didn’t see the rude expression on Linghu Chong’s face.

Linghu Chong glanced over the crowd by the side with cold shoulder. Boxes and packages of presents were brought onboard, and a good number of them were specifically for Yue Lingshan. One after another maids walked aboard the boat and presented the presents to Yue Lingshan.

“Here are some cookies and candies for Miss Yue from Granny Wang. These are some dresses for Miss Yue to wear on the road from Madam Wang and some jewelry for Miss Yue to wear from the other Madam Wang....” It almost seemed as if Yue Lingshan was a family member of the Wang Family.

Yue Lingshan thanked again and again happily with a big smile across her face. "Wow! I don't think I can eat that much. That's too many dresses for me!"

An old man in shabby clothing suddenly walked aboard amid the exciting crowd. "Young Master Linghu," he called out.

Seeing that the old man was none other than the Elder Bamboo-Green, Linghu Chong was taken by surprise. He immediately stepped forth to greet him.

"My auntie asked me to give this small present to Young Master Linghu." Elder Bamboo-Green raised his arms and presented a long package wrapped in a piece of blue coarse cloth in white flower patterns. Linghu Chong bowed and then took the package.

"Many thanks to the senior master! I am truly grateful!" He bowed again.

The Wang Jiajun and Wang Jiaju brothers caught the entire scene in their eyes. Seeing how Linghu Chong didn't even bother to cast a glimpse to the famous Unbeatable Golden Blade Grandmaster Wang, yet showed such deep respect to an old folk in shabby clothing, they couldn't help but feel enraged. If it hadn't for the sake of the Yue Buqun couple and the many apprentice brothers and sisters of the Huashan Sword School, they would have dragged Linghu Chong out and give him a good beating to vent their spleen. When they saw Elder Bamboo-Green step onto the gangboard from the bow to get back ashore after giving Linghu Chong the package, they gave each other a meaningful glance and then jostled toward the old man with their shoulders abruptly from both sides, thinking that just a slight bump would have sent the old folk falling down into the Luo River. Although the water was quite shallow near the shore and wouldn't drown the old man, at least it would make Linghu Chong lose a great deal of face.

"Watch out!" seeing what was going on, Linghu Chong called out in a hurry.



He was just about to reach out and grab the two brothers when he suddenly remembered that he didn't have any inner strength left in him to go with the grab. He wouldn't be able to grab onto them anyway. Even if he did get his hands onto the Wang brothers, it would be useless just the same. Within seconds, the Wang brother had bumped into Elder Bamboo-Green.

"Don't!" Wang Yuanba shouted out.

Wang Yuanba knew clearly that he was very different from ordinary martial people, for he had a big family and lots of properties in the city of Luoyang. His two grandsons were both young and vigorous. If this old and feeble folk had died because of the jostle, there would be endless trouble when the law enforcement began their investigation. But since he was sitting inside the cabin talking to Yue Buqun at the time, it was already too late for him to stop them.

A loud thud rose as the two shoulders from the two brothers bumped squarely onto Elder Bamboo-Green. All of a sudden, two figures flew in the air. Immediately followed were two loud splashes – the Wang brothers had fallen into the Luo River one from each side of the gangboard. It almost seemed as if the old man was a big leather bag filled with air, and when the two Wang brothers bumped into it, they simply bounced right back. The old man kept his slow pace and went tottering off the gangboard onto the bank as if nothing had happened.

As soon as the Wang brothers fell into the river, the crowd aboard the boat broke into chaos. Several sailors jumped into the river in a hurry and dragged the two out of the water. It was still early in the spring. Even though all the ice in the river had melted, the river was still icy cold. Neither of the Wang brothers knew how to swim, so they both drank a good mouthful of water. Their teeth shuddering non-stop, both of the brothers found themselves in a very embarrassing situation.

In shock, Wang Yuanba checked his two grandsons, but what he saw astounded him even more. The four arms of the two brothers were all dislocated at the shoulder joints and elbow joints, which looked exactly the same as how they had broke Linghu Chong's arms the other day. Their arms hanging by their sides, the two brothers still spilled out streams of abuses wildly.

Seeing what had happened to his two sons, Wang Zhongqiang leapt off the boat onto the bank and blocked Elder Bamboo-Green's way. But Elder Bamboo-Green still kept his slow pace, his back arched, his head bending low.

"Who are you? Are you here to make trouble for the Wang Family in Luoyang?" Wang Zhongqiang yelled.

Elder Bamboo-Green kept walking as if he had not heard anything. Slowly, he came closer and closer toward Wang Zhongqiang.

Everyone aboard the boat had their eyes fixed on the two as Elder Bamboo-Green stepped closer and closer to Wang Zhongqiang, who extended his arms slightly out and blocked in the middle of the road. Gradually, the distance between the two shortened, from ten feet to five feet, and then from five feet to three feet.

As Elder Bamboo-Green took another step forward, Wang Zhongqiang yelled, "Enough!" He reached out with his two hands and smacked them down at Elder Bamboo-Green's back in claw hands. Just when his fingers were about to touch Elder Bamboo-Green's back, all of a sudden, his giant body flew in the air for tens of feet. Amid the gasps and screams of the crowd, he did a back flip in the air and then landed on the ground steadily.

When two persons ran toward each other in high speed, it would not be surprising if one of them flew in the air like this from the colliding force. But what seemed very strange was the fact that Wang Zhongqiang stood still while Elder Bamboo-Green closed in on him very slowly yet was still able to send him flying in the air from the colliding force. Even

elite fighters like Yue Buqun or Wang Yuanba had no clue as what techniques the old man used to bump people into flying in the air like that.

Since Wang Zhongqiang landed so steadily without any sign of sore straits, people in the crowd who didn't know any martial arts skills actually thought that he had leapt up all by himself to show off his Qing-Gong. The many servants and chairmen put their hands together and cheered happily. Many couldn't wait to start praising the superb martial arts skills Master Wang had just put on display.

Wang Yuanba had been greatly surprised when he had found out that the Elder Bamboo-Green dislocated his two grandsons' arms so easily in a bump without even batting an eyelid. He figured that he could achieve the same effect himself, but it would have been very forceful and overwhelming, never as subtle as the way the old man did it, and never as swift either. By the time he saw his son sent into the air from the bump, it was no longer surprise in his heart but rather terror. He knew very well that this second son of his had mastered all of his skills and techniques. Not only could he wield a saber in an unruffled yet fierce manner, his skills in fighting barehanded and his accomplishment in inner energy were also very adequate, no less than what he himself had achieved in his prime of life. But before the two even exchanged one move, his son had already been knocked flying in the air. That was something he had never seen in his life. Noticing that his son wanted to run back for a fight after the setback, he called out immediately.

"Zhongqiang, come here!"

Wang Zhongqiang turned around and leapt back onboard. Spitting on the floor angrily, he cursed resentfully, "What a stinking, old rascal! He probably knows some kind of witchcraft!"

"How do you feel? Any injuries?" Wang Yuanba asked in a whisper.

Wang Zhongqiang shook his head.

Wang Yuanba pondered upon the situation, but only concluded that it was likely that he still lacked enough skills to take on this old man. And if he asked Yue Buqun to fight the old man together with him, it would be no glory winning the fight. So the best way out probably would be pretending that nothing had happened and just get on with it. The old man did show some mercy by not wounding his son or throwing his son off balance. That had already saved him from losing face. He watched the Elder Bamboo-Green slowly walking away, his heart filled with some kind of indescribable discomfort.

"This old man, of course, is a friend of Linghu Chong," he thought to himself, "and because my grandsons broke Linghu Chong's two arms, he came to get even by breaking their arms. I have ruled the martial arts society in the Luoyang region for all my life. Could it be possible that I am destined to fall hard in my old age?"

By then Wang Bofen had put his two nephews' dislocated parts back in place. Two sedan chairs carried the two dripping wet young men back to their home.

"Mr. Yue, do you know who he is? I am so dim-sighted from my old age. I couldn't tell who that elite was at all," Wang Yuanba glanced at Yue Buqun and asked.

"Chong, who is he?" Yue Buqun asked.

"He is Elder Bamboo-Green," Linghu Chong answered.

Wang Yuanba and Yue Buqun both uttered a cry of surprise. Even though they both went to that small alley the other day, neither of them had a chance to meet Elder Bamboo-Green face to face. And it just happened that the only one who would be able to recognize Elder Bamboo-Green, Mr. Yi, decided to see the guests off at the gate of the Wang house instead of coming to the wharf. That was why no one had a clue as who this old man was.

"What did he give you?" Pointing at the package wrapped in blue cloth, Yue Buqun asked.

"I haven't opened it yet," Linghu Chong answered.

He opened the package and found a short zither inside. The zither's body looked ancient and obsolete. Obviously, the zither was an invaluable antique. Two characters "Yan Yu" in ancient script were calved on the tail of the zither. Inside the package was also a booklet with the words "Song of Peace and Serenity" written on the cover. Feelings of gratitude swelled Linghu Chong's heart. He couldn't help but let out a cry of joy.

"What?" Yue Buqun stared at him and asked.

"This senior master not only gave me a zither, but also copied down the entire music score for me," Linghu Chong explained.

He turned the booklet open and flipped through it. Every page was filled with beautiful calligraphy in small fonts. Not only were there words and symbols recording the music tone, there were also a great deal of notes and comments explaining in detail about the fingering techniques and various keynotes about zither play in general. The papers and the ink prints all looked new, apparently, the granny had just hand printed the entire booklet. Deeply moved by the granny's affectionate love and care, Linghu Chong found tears rolling in his eyes.

Wang Yuanba and Yue Buqun saw with their own eyes that the booklet only contained techniques relating to zither play, and some of the strange characters and symbols were indeed similar to the ones inside the "Smiling Proud Wanderer" music score booklet. Although there were still many suspicions in their hearts, they had nothing else to add.

"A true master never reveals his abilities unless necessary. Who would have thought that this Elder Bamboo-Green is actually an elite in the Martial World? Chong, do you know which school or clan he is from?" Yue Buqun asked. He had figured that even if Linghu Chong did know the answer, he would still not tell the truth, but he asked anyway, for it

disturbed him very much to not know any details about such an elite fighter with such superb Kung Fu skills.

Not to his surprise, Linghu Chong answered, "I only studied zither from this senior master. I didn't even know he had martial arts skills."

After Yue Buqun and Madam Yue bid their farewell to Wang Yuanba and the Wang Bofen, Wang Zhongqiang brothers, the boat set sail toward the north, and soon were hundreds of feet away from ashore. The many apprentices soon engaged each other into a hearted discussion. Some were convinced that Elder Bamboo-Green had unusually superb Kung Fu skills while some others believed that nothing could prove that the old man had great skills, the young Wang brothers only fell into the river because of their recklessness, and Wang Zhongqiang only leapt away because he didn't want to take the old man up on it.

Linghu Chong sat at the back of the boat to read the music score by himself, having no interest listening to the discussion among his junior apprentice brothers and sisters. Following the directions from the booklet, he lay his finger on the strings and felt the keys. Afraid to disturb his Master and Master-Wife, he only practiced the positioning and didn't really make any sound.

The boat was heading in the same direction as the wind and the wave, thus gained some good speed. Madam Yue walked to the bow and tried to enjoy the scenery, but that didn't help her get rid of the image of the odd looking Elder Bamboo-Green in her head at all. Many disquieting thoughts surged in her mind when suddenly, her husband's voice rose next to her ear.

"What do you think of that Elder Bamboo-Green?"

This question was the exact same one she had wanted to ask her husband, so even though he had asked it first, she still asked, "What do you think of him?"

"That old man's technique was so unusual and strange. Without even moving his arms or legs, he was still able to

knock the three members of the Wang Family flying far in the air. I'd have to say that his techniques aren't from any orthodox school," Yue Buqun answered.

"But he seems to be very nice to Chong, and it didn't look like he was intentionally making trouble for the Golden Blade Wang Family," Madam Yue remarked.

"I hope this is the end of it. Or else, the great reputation Grandmaster Wang had built up throughout his life might be at the very brink of ruin." Yue Buqun heaved a sigh. He paused for a good while before speaking again, "Even though we are continuing our journey by water now, it is still wise to be cautious."

"Are you saying that someone might come aboard to make trouble?" Madam Yue inquired.

Yue Buqun shook his head. "We are still kept in the dark. We still have no idea who those fifteen masked assassins are and where they came from. We are in the light while our enemy is still in the dark. Our journey might not be as peaceful as we'd like it to be."

Ever since Yue Buqun became the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, he had never experienced any serious setbacks until recently. But in the last couple of months, he had realized there was a good chance that many difficulties were awaiting them in the road ahead. But who was the enemy, and what did the enemy want? He couldn't find an answer. Just because of this clueless feeling he was laden with more and more anxiety.

That day, the Yue couple urged their apprentices again and again to be on good guard days and nights, but as time went by, their boat entered the main river from near the Zigong County and then headed east following the flow of the river; not even one accident happened. The further away they were from Luoyang, the more relaxed each one became. And before long, their vigilance gradually slacked away.

# **Chapter 14: Wine Cups**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**Zu Qianqiu reached into his pocket and took out a wine cup. Smooth and soft, it was actually a white jade cup. He reached in again, and went on taking out more and more wine cups**

People in Kaifeng started among the Yue Buqun couple and their apprentices.

“Even though Kaifeng is a big city, there’s not a great deal of interest in martial arts around here. And for people like old Escort Hua, senior Master Hai, or the Three Elites of Henan, they have neither truly outstanding martial arts skills nor great fame. Let’s just tour around some of the scenic spots and historical sites. We can skip visiting anyone or any studios so we won’t disturb anyone,” Yue Buqun suggested.

“But senior apprentice brother, have you forgotten that very famous figure in the city of Kaifeng?” Madam Yue grinned.

“A very famous figure? Who...who are you referring to?” Yue Buqun asked.

“‘Cure one and kill one; kill one then cure one. Cure as many as I kill; that shows my skill.’ Now who’s that?” Madam Yue gave a hint.

“Aha, you are talking about the ‘Killer Doctor’ Ping One-Finger. He is indeed very famous. But he’s so eccentric that he most probably wouldn’t want to see us even if we paid him a visit,” Yue Buqun said with a smile.

“That’s true. Or else we could have asked this Killer Doctor to take a look at Chong’s injuries since Chong’s inner wounds are not getting any better and we just happen to be coming to Kaifeng anyway,” Madam Yue agreed.

“Mom, what does the nickname Killer Doctor mean? If he is a killer, how can he be a famous doctor?” Yue Lingshan asked in curiosity.

“Well, this Doctor Ping is a weirdo...well...a strange fellow in the Martial World. He has profound medical knowledge and his magical hands can bring the dying back to life. It is said

that regardless of how ill or how badly wounded the patient is, so long as he agrees to work on him the patient will be cured for sure. But he has this very odd rule. He says that God of Heaven and Lord of Underworld, of course, both know how many people are there in this world. If he cured too many people so that less people die, there would be too many living and too few dead. Certainly the Lord of Underworld is not going to be too fond of that. And when his final days come, even if the Lord of Underworld leaves him alone, his officers and goblins would for sure get even with him, therefore, his days in the underworld probably are not going to be easy at all," Madam Yue explained with a light grin.

Quite amused by these words, all the apprentices giggled.

"That's why he made an oath," Madam Yue continued, "that so long as he cures someone, he must kill another one to even the numbers. And if he kills someone, he must cure another one to make up. He put up this big banner right in his office, which said clearly, 'Cure one and kill one; kill one then cure one. Cure as many as I kill; that shows my skill.' He says that because of this practice, the God of Heaven wouldn't fault him for taking away lives, and Lord of Underworld wouldn't blame him for taking over his business either."

The entire audience burst into loud laughter.

"What a funny guy this Doctor Ping One-Finger is! But why does he have such a strange name? Has he only one finger?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"I think he has more than just one finger," Madam Yue answered. "Senior apprentice brother, do you know why he picked such a name?" she asked her husband.

"Doctor Ping has all ten fingers. He called himself One-Finger because either to kill or to cure, he only needs one finger to do it. If he wants to kill someone, he just hits him

with one finger, and if he wants to cure someone, he only uses one finger to check pulses," Yue Buqun clarified.

"Oh, I see. Then I suppose he must be an expert in sealing acupoints," Madam Yue remarked.

"That I am not too sure. There probably isn't that many who has fought this Doctor Ping before. Everyone in the Martial World knows how good of a doctor he is. In one's life, who can say that he is immune to unexpected misfortunes? Maybe one day he will need to ask for Doctor Ping's help, that's why no one wants to offend Doctor Ping. But unless it's absolutely necessary, no one would just rashly ask for his help either," Yue Buqun said.

"Why's that?" Yue Lingshan couldn't help but ask.

"Because whenever a fellow martial person asks him to cure a wound or disease, he would make this person swear an oath ahead of time that after the person is cured, he must obey Dr. Ping's order to kill a person Dr. Ping specifies. This is called one life in exchange for another. It's easier if the person is asked to kill someone totally unrelated to himself, but if he is asked to kill someone who's a close friend of his, or even his father, brother, wife, or son, then wouldn't it be real difficult?" Yue Buqun explained.

"This Doctor Ping is truly odd!" the apprentices remarked.

"Big apprentice brother, in that case, you can't really ask him to work on you then," Yue Lingshan concluded.

Linghu Chong had been propping against the door at the backside, listening to Master and Master-Wife discussing the peculiarity of the "Killer Doctor" Ping One-Finger. When he heard little apprentice sister's words, he replied with a slight smile on his cheeks.

"That's right! I would be very afraid if he asks me to kill my little apprentice sister, once he cures me."

That brought loud laughter out from the rest of the apprentices.

Yue Lingshan also grinned. "This Doctor Ping has no grudge against me. Why would he ask you to kill me?" She turned her head and asked her father, "Dad, then is this Doctor Ping a good guy or a bad guy?"

"Well, it is said that he is quite grumpy, and always do things to his liking, sometimes chivalrous and sometimes irregular. He is really neither a good guy nor a bad guy. To say it nicely, he is a strange genius. But in plain words, he would be a freak," Yue Buqun answered.

"Here's what I think. Many of the rumors flowing around the Martial World are really exaggerations, and this might just be one of them. When we get to the city of Kaifeng, I'd like to go pay a visit to this Doctor Ping," Yue Lingshan responded.

"Nonsense! Don't be mischievous!" Both Yue Buqun and Madam Yue admonished almost in unison.

Seeing the solemn expression on her parents' faces, Yue Lingshan was slightly stunned. "Why?" she asked.

"Meeting people like this? Are you out of your mind? Trouble will come looking for you if you do," Yue Buqun reproached.

"Why would trouble come looking for me just for a visit? I am not asking him to cure me. What's the big deal?" Yue Lingshan mumbled.

"We are here to enjoy visiting scenes, not to cause troubles." Yue Buqun pulled a long face.

Seeing how angry her father had become, Yue Lingshan dared not speak another word. But her curiosity toward this "Killer Doctor Ping One-Finger" only grew bigger and bigger.

At early morning the next day, the boat entered the city limits of Kaifeng. But it was still quite a distance from the real city.

"Guess what?" Yue Buqun smiled a big grin. "There's this place not far from here where a member of our Yue family once became the center of the limelight many years ago. We'd better pay a visit there."

“Yay! I know! I know! It’s Zhuxian Town, where General Yue, Yue Pengju,<sup>18</sup> kicked Jin Wushu’s<sup>19</sup> behind big time,” Yue Lingshan cheered.

Yue Fei, who fought the Jin army and defended China, was a heroic figure all martial people admired deeply in their hearts, and Zhuxian Town was the place where Yue Fei had completely crushed the Jin army. Naturally, everyone in the group wanted to check it out.

“Hurry up! Let’s go to the Zhuxian Town first. Then we’ll have lunch inside the city of Kaifeng,” Yue Lingshan leapt ashore ahead of everyone else and shouted.

The passengers started walking off the boat except Linghu Chong who remained sitting by the backside of the boat.

“Big apprentice brother, aren’t you going?” Yue Lingshan asked.

Ever since Linghu Chong had lost all his inner energy, he often felt weary and tired and didn’t want to move much. He figured that since everybody else was going ashore to have fun, it would be the perfect opportunity for him to learn that “Song of Peace and Serenity.” Besides, seeing how Lin Pingzhi stood side by side with Yue Lingshan, looking intimate and affectionate, he felt even more uncomfortable.

“I am too tired. I won’t be able to keep up with you guys,” he answered.

“Alright, have a good rest then. I’ll get you some good wine from the city of Kaifeng,” Yue Lingshan replied.

Sorrow swelled Linghu Chong’s heart as he watched Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi walk away abreast, leading the way ahead of everyone else.

“Even if learning the ‘Song of Peace and Serenity’ could really cure my internal wounds, why would I bother to cure and why would I bother to learn the music?” he thought to himself.

Staring at the muddy waves of the Yellow River surging east continuously, he suddenly felt that life’s pain and

suffering were really no different from the flowing river – both would come wave after wave and never stop. The thought triggered a disruption in his inner energy flow. An immense pain from his lower abdomen immediately consumed him.

Meanwhile, Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi certainly were in a completely different mood. Walking side by side, whispering in each other's ears, the two were having a wonderful time.

"Lingshan and Pingzhi are both still young. A man and a woman walking together like this might be all right in the countryside, but it certainly wouldn't be appropriate in a big city. Why don't we give them some company?" Madam Yue gave her husband a pull on the sleeve and whispered.

"We are no longer young. I guess it would be totally appropriate for us to walk together then," Yue Buqun joked.

Madam Yue let out a smile and then caught up with Yue Lingshan in quick paces. The four of them asked their way from pedestrians and then headed straight toward the Zhuxian Town. Just when they were about to enter the Zhuxian Town, a big shrine by the roadside caught their attention. The sign on top of the shrine had four words in golden paint, "Shrine of General Yang."

"Dad, I know this one. This is the shrine for General Yang Zai-Xing.<sup>20</sup> He went to River Shang by mistake and was killed by the Jin archers," Yue Lingshan said.

"Correct! General Yang died defending his country. That is something that deserves great respect and admiration. Let's go in the shrine to pay our respects to the spirit of a martyr," Yue Buqun replied.

At the time, the many apprentices were still far behind, so the four of them decided to go inside without waiting for the rest of the group. A statue of Yang Zai-Xing occupied the middle of the shrine. The man in the statue had a white face and wore a set of silver-colored armor, looking very heroic.

"This General Yang is so handsome!" Yue Lingshan thought to herself. She couldn't help but turn around and

cast a glance at Lin Pingzhi to compare Lin Pingzhi with the statue in her heart.

Suddenly a voice came from outside the shrine.

"I bet you this Shrine of General Yang is built for Yang Zai-Xing."

Recognizing the voice, both Yue Buqun and Madam Yue immediately grabbed onto the hilts of their swords and their faces turned pale.

Then another voice rose, "There are many generals named Yang. How can you be so sure that this is Yang Zai-Xing? Why can't he be Golden Blade Grandpa Yang,<sup>[21](#)</sup> or even Yang the Sixth<sup>[22](#)</sup> or Yang the Seventh?"<sup>[23](#)</sup>

"Just within the Yang Family Corp, there are many possibilities. It doesn't necessarily have to be Grandpa Yang, or Yang the Sixth, or Yang the Seventh. Who says it can't be Yang Zongbao<sup>[24](#)</sup> or Yang Wenguang?"<sup>[25](#)</sup> another voice argued.

"Why can't it be Yang the Fourth?" yet another voice joined the debate.

"Yang the Fourth surrendered to the foreign invader. No one's going to build a shrine for him," the previous one explained.

"Are you implying that I will surrender to the foreign invader because I am the fourth?" the other one mocked.

"Sure, you are the fourth. But what has that gotten anything to do with Yang the fourth?" the previous one argued.

"You are the fifth. Yang the Fifth ended up becoming a monk on Mount Wutai. Why aren't you a monk then?" the other one challenged.

"If I become a monk, you'll have to surrender to the foreign invader," the previous one responded.

Only after hearing the first sentence, Yue Buqun and Madam Yue had already figured out who they were - the bunch of Peach Valley's Freaks. Yue Buqun waved a signal; the four of them quickly hid behind the statue, the Yue



couple on the left and Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi on the right.

The bunch of Peach Valley's Freaks kept arguing outside of the shrine, yet neither of them would simply come in to get the answer. Yue Lingshan couldn't help but feel amused.

"What's there to argue about? Whether it was Yang Zai-Xing or Yang the Fourth, why not just come in here and take a look? Wouldn't that save a lot of trouble?" she thought to herself amusingly.

Madam Yue listened carefully and could only recognize five different voices. She figured that the sixth one must have died from her sword stab. The reason why she had left Mount Huashan with her husband was to stay away from those five freaks, afraid that they might go back for revenge. Who would have expected that they would meet right here? Even though the freaks hadn't spotted their group of four yet, the other apprentices could show up any minute, and they would have no way of escaping at all. Worries clouded her mind.

The debate among the five freaks became more and more heated, and finally one of them suggested, "Why don't we go inside and take a look. Then we'll see which stinking guy this shrine was built for."

The five of them all rushed in alongside, and one of them shouted excitedly.

"Aha, look here! It clearly says here 'Shrine of General Yang Sir Zai-Xing's Spirit.' This of course is Yang Zai-Xing." It was Branch Fairy.

Trunk Fairy scratched his head for a brief moment and then spoke, "It says 'Yang Sir Zai' here, not 'Yang Zai-Xing.' I see. This General Yang's first name is Sir Zai. Hmm, Yang Sir Zai, Yang Sir Zai, what a great name!"

"This obviously is Yang Zai-Xing. You are so full of it. Why are you saying that it's Yang Sir Zai?" Branch Fairy was infuriated.

“Read the words! It clearly says ‘Yang Sir Zai’, not ‘Yang Zai-Xing’.” Trunk Fairy argued.

“Then what do the words ‘Xing’s Spirit’ stand for?” Root Fairy joined in.

“Xing means happy.<sup>26</sup> Xing’s Spirit means the spirit is very happy. After this chap Yang Sir Zai died, people even built a shrine for him, of course his spirit is going to feel very happy,” Leaf Fairy explained.

“Exactly! Exactly!” Trunk Fairy couldn’t agree more.

“Didn’t I say that the shrine was built for Yang the Seventh? I am right once again! Man, I am so smart!” Flower Fairy said contentedly.

“It is Yang Zai-Xing. How can it be Yang the Seventh?” Branch Fairy asked angrily.

“It is Yang Sir Zai. How can it be Yang the Seventh?” Trunk Fairy also asked angrily.

“Third brother, what’s Yang Zai-Xing’s ranking among his brothers?” Flower Fairy asked.

“I don’t know.” Branch Fairy shook his head.

“Yang Zai-Xing was the seventh child. He was Yang the Seventh,” Flower Fairy claimed. “Second brother, what’s Yang Sir Zai’s ranking among his brothers?”

“I used to know. But I don’t remember now,” Trunk Fairy murmured.

“Well, I do remember. He was the seventh child also. That’s why he was Yang the Seventh as well,” Flower Fairy said with a big grin.

“If this statue is Yang Zai-Xing, then it can’t be Yang Sir Zai. If it’s Yang Sir Zai, then it can’t be Yang Zai-Xing. How can it be both Yang Zai-Xing and Yang Sir Zai?” Root Fairy remarked.

“Big brother, think. What’s the meaning of the word ‘Zai?’ ‘Zai’ means again, another one. This must be a statue for two, not just one. That’s why it’s both Yang Sir Zai and Yang Zai-Xing,” Leaf Fairy explained.

“That sounds logical!” The other four Fairies all agreed.

“You say that if there’s the word ‘Zai’ in one’s name, that means one more, then it’s obviously public knowledge that Yang the Seventh had seven sons!” Branch Fairy suddenly remarked.

“Following that logic, then if someone’s name contained the word ‘Thousand,’ he will have to raise one thousand sons?” Root Fairy asked.

Hearing that the debate took such odd turns, Yue Lingshan almost broke into loud laughter. But she bit her lips hard and kept her silence.

The five Peach Valley’s freaks argued some more when Branch Fairy suddenly blurted out, “Yang the Seventh! If you give blessings to our sixth brother and let him live, I am willing to kowtow to you. Actually, I am going to kowtow right now.” He knelt down on the floor and kowtowed sincerely.

Hearing those words, Yue Buqun and Madam Yue exchanged a glance, each feeling somewhat relieved. Apparently that freak was still alive even though he took a severe stab from Madam Yue. Those Peach Valley’s Six Fairies’ behaviors were so hard to make sense of; the Yue couple would rather not make an enemy out of them.

“But what if sixth brother dies?” Branch Fairy asked.

“Then I’ll smash this statue to bits and pieces and piss on whatever is left of him,” Trunk Fairy answered.

“Even if you smash the statue of Yang the Seventh into bits and pieces, and then piss on it or even shit on it, so what? Sixth brother would be dead already, and your kowtow would all be wasted!” Flower Fairy reminded him.

“You are right! I better hold the kowtow for now. Let’s go get a clear answer, whether sixth brother’s wound is curable or not. If it’s curable, we can come back to kowtow; if it’s not, then we’ll come here to piss on him,” Branch Fairy agreed.

“If it’s curable, he will be cured whether we kowtow or not. There’s no need to kowtow. If it’s not, he won’t be cured whether we piss or not. We can skip pissing,” Root Fairy remarked.

“If sixth brother’s wound is incurable, then we just skip peeing? Aren’t our bladder gonna explode if we skip peeing? We could die!” Leaf Fairy asked.

Trunk Fairy suddenly broke into a loud cry. “If sixth brother won’t survive this, we’ll all stop taking a piss, even if we’ll all die because of that.”

At those words, the rest four fairies also broke into loud cries.

“Wait a minute,” Branch Fairy suddenly stopped crying and instead, burst into loud laughter. “If sixth brother can be cured, wouldn’t we be just crying for nothing? Come on guys, let’s get a clear answer first, and then we can cry later.”

“What you just said doesn’t make sense at all. If sixth brother can be cured, then why would we be crying later?” Flower Fairy disagreed.

Amid the non-stop arguing, the five men rushed out of the shrine in quick steps.

“Whether that man will survive or not is of great importance to us,” Yue Buqun said to Madam Yue. “Let me go look into this. Junior apprentice sister, you, Lingshan, and the other apprentices can stay here and wait for me.”

“You can’t just go all by yourself. Let me go with you and watch your back,” Madam Yue replied in a determined tone and then ran out of the shrine first.

In the past, when Yue Buqun had important matters to deal with, Madam Yue would always go with him to aid. Hearing what his wife had said, Yue Buqun knew that it would be impossible to change her mind, so he simply followed quietly.

After the two of them went out of the shrine, from a distance, they could see the Peach Valley’s Five Freaks turn into a col from a small path. Following the five men quietly, they dared not stay too close and kept a good distance. Thanked to the loud and non-stop arguing from the five, it wasn’t hard for them to shadow the freaks from a long distance behind.

Following the mountain path, after passing by a dozen or so big willow trees, they came to a small creek. Several tile-roofed houses stood next by the creek. The arguing sound from the five freaks went straight into one of the houses.

"Let's circle around to the backside of the house," Yue Buqun suggested.

The couple ran toward their right using their Qing-Gong skills and circled back after about a quarter of a mile. A row of willow trees stood at the backside of the house. The two hid themselves behind the willow trees and listened.

Suddenly, the yelling voice of the Peach Valley's five freaks broke out abruptly.

"You just killed our sixth brother!"

"Why...why did you cut his chest open?"

"I am gonna kill you son of a bitch!"

"We'll cut your chest open too!"

"Oh, no! Sixth brother! You have died a horrible death! We...we'll never take a piss again, even if our bladders explode."

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue were astonished. "Did someone just cut their sixth brother's chest open?"

After exchanging some gestures, the two of them crept next to the window and looked inside from a crack of the window.

About seven or eight lights lit the entire room and a large bed occupied the middle of the room. A naked man lay on the bed facing up, his chest cut wide open and blood gushing everywhere. The man's eyes shut tightly as if he had been dead for sometime. His face showed clearly that he was none other than the Fruit Fairy who took a stab from Madam Yue on top of Mount Huashan. The remaining five Peach Valley Freaks stood around the bed, shouting and yelling hysterically at a short, stocky man.

The short, stocky man had a larger-than-average head. The sparse mustache on his lips and the way he moved his head back and forth added much comical effect to his

appearance. Both of his hands were covered with blood, the short dagger in his right hand also had blood dripping down from the tip of the blade. He stared at the five Peach Valley Freaks for a while and finally spoke.

“Are you done farting?”

“We are done. It’s your turn now,” the five freaks answered in unison.

“This half-dead man took a stab in the chest,” the short, stocky guy replied. “You treated the wound with ointment and then carried him such a long way here so that I can save his life. But you were too slow. The wound had grown back together and all the nerves and internal passages had grown back the wrong way. Just to save his life is easy. But since his nerves and internal messages are all messed up, he will not only lose all his Kung Fu, but also become paralyzed from waist down. Why would I want to create such a good-for-nothing?”

“A good-for-nothing is still better than a dead man,” Root Fairy challenged.

“Humph, either I cure him completely or I don’t touch him at all. How utterly embarrassing it will be if I only make him into a good-for-nothing? Enough, enough! Now take this corpse and get out of here. I don’t want to work on him no more! You guys are annoying me to death!” the short, stocky man snapped.

“You said we ‘annoy you to death,’ why aren’t you dead yet?” Root Fairy asked.

“You have already annoyed me to death. Can’t you tell? How do you know that I am not dead already?” the short, stocky man stared right into Root Fairy’s eyes and answered in a chilly tone.

“If you are incapable of curing my sixth brother, why did you cut open his chest?” Trunk Fairy asked.

“What does my nickname say?” the short, stocky man asked coldly.

“Isn’t your stinking nickname something like ‘Killer Doctor’?” Trunk Fairy answered.

A chill went through the Yue Couple’s bodies as they cast a glimpse at each other, both thinking the same thing, “Who would have thought that this odd looking short fatty turned out to be the world-renowned ‘Killer Doctor?’ That’s right, it is said throughout the Martial World that this Ping One-Finger possesses the most excellent skills in healing and curing. It would only be natural that the five freaks took their seriously wounded brother to him for a cure.”

Ping One-Finger’s cold voice rose again. “Since my nickname is ‘Killer Doctor,’ what’s such a big deal when I kill one or two?”

“What’s so hard about killing somebody? Even I know how to do that. But you only know how to kill people, not how to cure people. You are not worth the part of the name where it says ‘doctor,’” Flower Fairy joined in.

“Who says I don’t know how to cure people? I cut open this half-dead man’s chest so that I can reconnect his nerves and internal passages. After I am finished with him, both his internal and external Kung Fu skills will remain the same as if he was never wounded. Only that will show the true skills of the ‘Killer Doctor,’” Ping One-Finger replied.

The five Peach Valley Freaks were overjoyed at these words. “So you are capable of curing our sixth brother. We shouldn’t have blamed you,” they responded in unison.

“Why...why aren’t you working on him? Sixth brother’s chest has been cut open. He is bleeding terribly. If you don’t hurry up, it will be too late,” Root Fairy reminded him.

“Now are you the ‘Killer Doctor’ or am I the ‘Killer Doctor’?” Ping One-Finger asked.

“Of course you are. What a dumb question that is!” Root Fairy answered.

“Very well! If I am, then how would you know whether it’s too late or not?” Ping One-Finger retorted. “Besides, I was already working on him after I cut his chest open. But how

can I get on with my work when five wordy creeps simply wouldn't shut up and leave me alone? Didn't I tell you to go have fun at the 'Shrine of General Yang' for a half-day and then also check out the 'Shrine of General Niu' and the 'Shrine of General Zhang?' Why have you come back so soon?"

"Hey, get on with your work. You are the wordy one now, not us," Trunk Fairy responded.

Ping One-Finger gave him a good stare for a moment, and then out of nowhere, he suddenly shouted out, "Get me the needle and the thread!"

The unexpected shout took the five Peach Valley's Fairies and the Yue couple by surprise; everyone's heart almost skipped a beat. A tall and thin woman walked in the room with a wooden basin in her hands. Quietly, she set the basin on the table. The woman was in her forties and had a square face with two big ears and a pair of sunken eyes. Her face looked pale and had little color in the cheeks.

"You want me to save this man here. I have already told you my rules, haven't I?" Ping One-Finger spoke again.

"Sure. And we have agreed to it and swore our oath already. No matter whom you want dead, just let us know. We promise that we won't disappoint you," Root Fairy answered.

"Good," Ping One-Finger nodded. "I haven't thought of anyone that I want dead. I'll let you know once I decide. Now, all of you stand over there and shut your mouth up. If I hear anything from you, I swear that I'll give it up and not give a damn about this man no more."

Ever since they were kids, the six Peach Valley brothers had always slept in the same room and eaten on the same table. They never stopped talking. Even in their dreams they kept on arguing back and forth. But now all they could do was to stare at each other, each had a stomach full of things he would love to spill out. When they thought that even a single word out of their mouth would get their sixth brother killed, each one of them bit his lips hard to fight the urge to



talk, afraid of letting any sound out, not even a heavy breath or a fart.

Ping One-Finger picked up a big needle from the tray on the table. After threading in the thick, diaphanous thread, he quickly sewed Fruit Fairy's chest back together. His ten fingers were short and chunky, almost like ten carrots, yet they moved with ultimate efficiency and accuracy. Within moments, he had already sewed the over nine-inch long wound back together. Then he took many kinds of medicine, some powder, some liquid, from the many china bottles behind him and applied them to the wound. Next, he pried Fruit Fairy's mouth open and poured some different kinds of liquid down the throat before wiping the blood off Fruit Fairy's body with a wet cloth. The tall and thin woman helped by the side, sometimes handing over the medicines, sometimes holding the needle for him, appearing to be very proficient.

Ping One-Finger glimpsed at the five Peach Valley's Fairies. Seeing that all five of them had already opened their mouths and were in a rush to begin talking, he said, "This man hasn't come back to life yet. You can begin talking after he comes back to life." With their mouths still open, the five freaks' faces froze instantly with a totally awkward look. Ping One-Finger let out a snort and then sat down by the side. The woman took the needle, thread, dagger and the rest of the stuff out of the room.

Hiding outside of the window, Yue Buqun and Madam Yue held their breaths. At the moment it was completely silent inside the room, so any little sound from outside of the window would, for sure, catch the attention of the people inside the room.

After a long while, Ping One-Finger stood up and walked by Fruit Fairy. All of a sudden, he struck out with his palm and smacked heavily on the Bai-Hui Acupoint on Fruit Fairy's head. "Ah!" six men shouted out in shock. Out of the six men, five were the Peach Valley's Five Fairies, and the sixth one

was actually the man lying on bed who had been unconscious all the time – Fruit Fairy.

Right after the cry, Fruit Fairy sat straight up and scolded, “God damn it! What the hell did you hit my head for?”

“God damn it! If I didn’t drill open your Bai-Hui Acupoint with my inner energy, would you have recovered so quickly?” Ping One-Finger scolded back.

“God damn it! Quick or slow, my recovery is none of your business!” Fruit Fairy rebuffed.

“God damn it! If your recovery were slow, how would people know the brilliance of the Killer Doctor’s skills? And wouldn’t it be annoying to have you sleep in my room any longer than necessary?” Ping One-Finger replied.

“God damn it! Are you saying that I am annoying you? I am getting out of here. You think I care about you?” Fruit Fairy mocked. As soon as he said those words, he rolled out of bed and headed out.

The other five Peach Valley Freaks had not expected him to recover so quickly and were able to walk out just like he said he would. In great shock and joy, they all followed him out of the door.

Completely shocked and terrified, the Yue couple all came to the same conclusion, “That Ping One-Finger’s medical skills are indeed astonishing. Besides, his inner strength is nothing ordinary, either. When he smacked the Bai-Hui Acupoint on Fruit Fairy’s head, he must have injected vigorous inner energy into Fruit Fairy’s body to wake him up instantly.” Within the moment of hesitation, the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies had gone far away.

Ping One-Finger stood up and then walked into another room. Yue Buqun gave his wife a signal, and the two quietly sneaked away. Not until they were hundreds of feet away from the room did they speed up their steps.

“That Killer Doctor’s inner strength is simply extraordinary. But his behavior was indeed very unusual,”

Madam Yue exclaimed.

“Since the Peach Valley’s Six Freaks are around, the city of Kaifeng has gotten to be a place of trouble. We’d better leave here at once. There’s no need for us to get tangled up with them,” Yue Buqun suggested.

Madam Yue answered with a hum. Throughout her life, only the last several months had given her the most grievances. Even her husband, the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, a member school of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, had to run around in hiding. And it almost felt as if there was nowhere safe no matter where they went. The couple had never kept anything from each other, but every time when this topic came up, both of them would immediately change topic to avoid the embarrassment. Now when they finally knew that Fruit Fairy would live on, both felt great relief as if a big rock had been removed from their hearts.

The two of them went straight back to the “Shrine of General Yang” and found Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi, Lao Denuo, and the rest of the apprentices waiting at the back hall.

“Let’s get back to the boat,” Yue Buqun ordered.

By then everybody had become aware that the Peach Valley’s Five Freaks were close by, so neither questioned the order and all returned to the boat in a hurry. Just when they were going to ask the boatman to set sail, the Peach Valley’s Five Fairies’ loud shouts suddenly came from ashore.

“Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! Where are you?”

All faces of the Huashan Sword School members changed color as they watched six men rushing toward the wharf in trots. Besides the Peach Valley’s Five Fairies, there was also Ping One-Finger among the group. The Peach Valley’s Five Fairies had seen the Yue Buqun couple before, so when they recognized Yue couple’s faces from afar, all cheered uncontrollably. Within seconds, they had arrived and immediately all five of them leapt toward the boat.

Instantly Madam Yue unsheathed her sword and stabbed it forward toward Root Fairy's chest. At the exact same time, Yue Buqun also drew his sword and pushed Madam Yue's blade down using that of his own.

"Don't be reckless!" he whispered.

The bow of the boat sunk slightly when the Peach Valley's Five Fairies boarded the boat.

"Linghu Chong! Where are you hiding? Why don't you come out?" Root Fairy yelled loudly.

"Why should I hide? Am I afraid of you?" Linghu Chong roared in fury.

Right at the moment, the boat bumped slightly and another person had leapt aboard - the "Killer Doctor" Ping One-Finger.

Yue Buqun felt a great shock inward. "The minute junior apprentice sister and I got back this dwarf shows up right here. Could we have left any traces when we sneaked about outside of his window? Could he have found the traces? The Peach Valley's Five Freaks alone are already hard enough to deal with, not mentioning adding such a tough opponent on top of that. Alas, perhaps our lives are destined to end here at Kaifeng today." Then he heard Ping One-Finger speak.

"May I ask which one of you is brother Linghu?"

Surprisingly, his words were quite polite.

"I am Linghu Chong. May I have your respectful name? May I ask what I can do for you?" Linghu Chong slowly walked onto the bow of the boat and answered.

Ping One-Finger looked Linghu Chong up and down. "Someone has asked me to treat your wounds," he said.

Reaching out and grabbing Linghu Chong by his hand, he placed his index finger on top of Linghu Chong's wrist and began checking his pulses. Suddenly, he raised his eyebrows and uttered a cry of surprise. But soon his eyebrows gradually knitted into a straight line and another cry of surprise followed. Raising his head high, he stared into the sky blankly, his left hand scratching his head madly.

"How odd! How odd!" he murmured to himself.

A long while passed before he reached out again to check Linghu Chong's pulse from the other wrist. But as soon as his index finger touched Linghu Chong's wrist, he sneezed all of a sudden.

"This is so weird. I've never seen anything like this before," he muttered.

Root Fairy could no longer hold his tongue and jumped in. "What's so odd about it? It's so obvious that he was wounded in his Heart Passage. I have already treated him with my inner energy."

"Why are you still insisting on saying that he was wounded in his Heart Passage? Obviously he had problems with his Lung Passage. If it weren't I who opened his many acupoints along the Lung Passage, you think he'd still be alive today?" Trunk Fairy immediately rebuffed.

Wasting no time, Branch Fairy, Leaf Fairy and Flower Fairy all jumped into the big debate, each claiming himself the only one that gave the right and critical treatment and the one who should get the credits.

Ping One-Finger suddenly gave a loud shout, "What crap!"

"Hey! Are you talking crap, or are we, the five brothers, talking crap?" Root Fairy mocked angrily.

"Of course you are!" Ping One-Finger answered. "Inside brother Linghu's body, there are two streams of stronger energy flow, which seemed to have come from Monk No Commandment. There are also six streams of weaker energy flow, which probably came from you guys, you six fools!"

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue shot a glance at each other, both thinking, "This Ping One-Finger is indeed incredible. It's not hard to detect the eight streams of energy flow inside Chong from his pulse, but it is completely amazing that he is able to identify the origin of the different energy streams and knew two of them came from Monk No Commandment."

“Why are you saying that our six energy streams are weaker and the god-damned No Commandment’s energy streams are stronger? There’s no doubt that ours are stronger and his are weaker!” Trunk Fairy snubbed furiously.

“What a nerve!” Ping One-Finger sneered. “He was only one, yet his two energy streams overwhelmed all the energy streams of the six of you combined. How the hell could yours be stronger, huh? Monk No Commandment the old scumbag, he has outstanding Kung Fu skills yet no brain! God damn it! What an idiot!”

Flower Fairy stuck his finger out and pretended to also check Linghu Chong’s pulse. “Well,” he said, “it seems that the energy streams of the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies are actually in total control and have completely overwhelmed Monk No Commandment’s....” Suddenly he cried out in pain and pulled his finger back quickly as if somebody has bitten it. “Ouch! God damn it!” he shouted.

Looking very pleased, Ping One-Finger burst into loud laughter. Everybody could tell that he must have passed his advanced inner energy through Linghu Chong’s body and gave Flower Fairy a painful shock.

After some more laughing, Ping One-Finger put the solemn face back on.

“Listen up, all of you! Go wait in the boat’s hold and be quiet! I don’t want hear a word out of you!”

“Wait a minute! What makes you think we’d do exactly what you tell us to do?” Leaf Fairy protested.

“Didn’t you swear an oath that you would kill a person for me?” Ping One-Finger asked.

“That’s right! But we only agreed to kill a person for you. We never agreed to follow your orders?” Branch Fairy answered.

“It’s totally up to you whether you want to follow my orders or not. But what if I ask you to kill the Fruit Fairy of the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies? What do you think?” Ping One-Finger sneered.

The Five Fairies all shouted out in protests. "That's outrageous! You have just cured him. Why are you asking us to kill him?"

"Well, what kind of oath did you five swear to me?" Ping One-Finger asked.

"We agreed that if you can cure our brother Fruit Fairy, then when you order us to kill a person, regardless of who that person is, we must do it. No excuses, whatsoever," Root Fairy replied.

"That's correct!" Ping One-Finger nodded. "Now did I cure your brother?"

"Yes, you did!" Flower Fairy concurred.

"Is Fruit Fairy a person?" Ping One-Finger pressed on.

"Of course he is a person. He is no ghost," Leaf Fairy answered.

"Fine. I want you to kill a person for me, and this person is Fruit Fairy!" Ping One-Finger concluded.

The five Fairies looked at each other in blank dismay. All felt that this order was unspeakably queer, yet neither of them could think of any argument.

"If you are not willing to kill Fruit Fairy, I am sure we can work something out. Now will you follow my orders? I am telling you to go sit in the boat's hold and behave yourselves. I don't want any movement or any word out of you," Ping One-Finger commanded.

The five Fairies hurriedly acknowledged the order, and within seconds, all five of them sat down in the hold, their hands on their knees and their backs straight up, making sure that no one could have behaved any better than them.

"Master Ping, I heard that you have this rule when you treat your patients: after you've cured the patient, he will have to kill someone for you. Is that true?" Linghu Chong asked.

"That's correct! I do have this rule," Ping One-Finger admitted.

"But I don't want to kill anyone for you, so please save your trouble and don't treat me," Linghu Chong exclaimed.

"Huh!" Ping One-Finger uttered a cry of surprise. He looked Linghu Chong up and down as if he had seen something totally eccentric and abnormal. After a long pause, he spoke again.

"Firstly, your case is too severe and I can't cure you; secondly, even if I could cure you, someone else has already agreed to kill for me. You don't have to worry about it at all."

Ever since Yue Lingshan had shifted her love interests to someone else, Linghu Chong had lost the joy of life. But when he heard from this famous doctor, who had such a great reputation with his capability of bringing the dying back to life, that even he couldn't cure the wounds, Linghu Chong still found himself swept by utter desolation.

The Yue couple gave each other a stare, both thinking, "Who has gotten such great due respect that could have made 'Killer Doctor' to make house calls? What kind of relationship does he have with Chong?"

"Brother Linghu," Ping One-Finger spoke again. "There are eight streams of foreign energy forces inside your body that could not be discharged, nor dissolved, nor tamed, nor overpowered, which have caused all the injuries and suffering. I was entrusted the task to cure your wounds. It's not that I am holding any effort back from you. Because your injuries are related to inner energy, that's why medicine and medical treatments won't do you any good. Ever since I became a doctor, I've never seen any injuries like this. Alas, there's really nothing I can do. I am so ashamed."

He took a china bottle out from his chest pocket and then poured ten vermilion pills into his palm.

"These are ten 'Heart-Soothing' pills. They contain many kinds of precious medicinal materials and took me a long time to make. Take one pill every ten days and you will be able to live for another one hundred days."

"Many thanks!" Linghu Chong took the pills respectfully.



Ping One-Finger turned around and headed toward the bank. But suddenly he turned back again. "There are two more pills in the bottle. I might as well give all of them to you." He took out the china bottle and handed it out.

But Linghu Chong didn't take it. "I can tell that senior master really treasure these pills very much. They must contain great healing power. It's probably better to keep them with you to save someone else in the future. Even if I could live ten days or twenty days longer, it's not gonna do anybody, even I myself, any good."

Ping One-Finger threw a sideways glance at Linghu Chong for a moment and then murmured, "Having no regards of one's own life, you do show the qualities of a true man. No wonder! No wonder! Alas, what a pity! I am sorry!"

He shook his giant head, turned around, leapt off the boat, and then walked off in big strides. He came and went so abruptly and completely ignored Yue Buqun, the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School. Yue Buqun was greatly annoyed. But there were still five menaces sitting in the boat's hold. Getting rid of them was not going to be an easy task.

The five Fairies all sat absolutely still, their eyes looking down, their hands on their knees, as if they were monks meditating in trance. If Yue Buqun ordered the boat to start sail, then the five menaces would have, for sure, been brought along. If he didn't order the boat to start sail, then nobody knew how long they were going to just sit there, or if they were going to jump up suddenly to attack in retaliation for the stab Madam Yue gave Fruit Fairy. Lao Denuo, Yue Lingshan, and some more apprentices had seen with their own eyes the horrible scene how the Fairies had ripped Cheng Buyou into pieces. Even now, each of them could still feel chills on their back from the fear. They simply gazed at each other in dismay, and neither was even brave enough to cast a glance at those five.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" Linghu Chong came back into the hold.

"We are just sitting here and behaving ourselves. We are not doing anything," Root Fairy answered.

"We are about to start sail. You can go back ashore now," Linghu Chong urged.

"Ping One-Finger told us to sit in the hold and behave ourselves, no talks and no movements. Otherwise, he is gonna ask us to kill our brother. That's why we are sitting here behaving ourselves and dare not talk or move," Branch Fairy replied.

Linghu Chong couldn't help but grin at these words. "Doctor Ping has gone ashore already. You can start talking and moving now!"

"No way! No way! What if he sees us talking and moving about? That's not going to be good!" Flower Fairy shook his head frantically.

Suddenly a croaky voice floated from ashore, "Hey, you five ugly goblins! Where are you?"

"I think he's calling us," Root Fairy suggested.

"Why do you think he's calling us? Are we ugly goblins?" Branch Fairy argued.

The voice shouted again, "I have one more ugly goblin here. Doctor Ping has just cured him. Do you want him or not? If you don't want him, I am gonna drop him in the river to feed the fish."

Hearing those, the five Fairies instantly leapt out of the hold side by side and landed ashore. The middle-aged woman who had helped Ping One-Finger with the operation stood by the river straight as a ramrod. With her left arm extended to the side, she lifted a stretcher in her left hand, and Fruit Fairy lay on the stretcher. The woman looked ill from her face yet had great strength. To lift the over one hundred pounds Fruit Fairy plus the wooden stretcher using only one arm seemed so easy for her.

"Of course we want him. Why would we not want him?" Root Fairy said hurriedly.

"Why are you calling us ugly goblins?" Branch Fairy asked.

"Look at yourself, you look more like an ugly goblin yourself," Fruit Fairy said while lying on the stretcher.

It turned out that after Ping One-Finger had sewed Fruit Fairy's wound back together, fed him some miraculous medicine, and then smacked his head to inject advanced inner energy, he immediately stood up and walked out. But due to the loss of great amount of blood, he fainted again after only a short distance and was brought back into the room by the middle-aged woman. Even though he was still far from recovering, his wounds didn't keep him from yielding to anyone orally, and he simply couldn't help but contradict the woman.

"Do you know what Doctor Ping fears the most in his life?" the woman asked coldly.

"We don't know. What does he fear the most?" the six Fairies replied in unison.

"He fears his wife!" the woman answered.

"We thought he feared nothing at all. Who would have though he actually fears his wife? Ha-ha! Oh my god! Ha-ha!" The Peach Valley's Six Fairies laughed so hard that they almost laughed their heads off.

"What's so funny? I am his wife," the woman said in a chilling tone.

Instantly, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies shut themselves up.

"He never dare disobey my orders," the woman continued. "If I want anyone dead, that person will be the one he tells you to kill."

"Yes! Yes! May we ask you who you want dead, Mrs. Ping?" the Peach Valley's Six Fairies asked in unison.

The woman cast a glance toward the boat's hold and looked at all the Huashan members one by one. Her eyes

moved from Yue Buqun to Madam Yue, then to Yue Lingshan, then to the rest of the Huashan apprentices. Every one could feel goose bumps all over his back, all knowing that if this woman with the ugly and bloodless face had pointed at one of them, the five Fairies would instantly rip that person into pieces. Even first class fighters like Yue Buqun perhaps wouldn't be able to escape from their hands.

The woman slowly looked away from the Huashan members and then turned her eyes to the faces of the six Fairies. The six brothers also felt their heart pounding in their chests from fear. "Uh," the woman let out a sound, and the six Fairies immediately answered, "Yes! Yes!" "Hum," the woman let out a snort, and the six Fairies again answered at once, "Yes! Yes!"

"I haven't thought of whom I want dead," the woman finally said. "But Doctor Ping said that there's a Young Master Linghu Chong on the boat who he respects very much. You must wait upon him until he dies. Whatever he tells you to do, you will do it for him with no exceptions. Do you hear me?"

"Wait upon him until he dies?" the Peach Valley's Six Fairies asked with big frowns.

"That's correct! Wait upon him until he dies. But he only has one hundred days left in this life. Within the next one hundred days, you must obey all of his orders," Mrs. Ping explained.

Hearing that Linghu Chong only had no more than one hundred days left, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies all became happy again. "Sure, to wait upon him for one hundred days shouldn't be that hard!" they all said.

"I am truly grateful for Master Ping's generous offer, but I dare not trouble the Peach Valley's Six Fairies to care for me," Linghu Chong rejected. "Will you please tell them to stay ashore? We hereby bid our farewell to you."

Mrs. Ping kept her cold face without any sign of joy or anger, whatsoever. "Doctor Ping said that Young Master

Linghu's internal injury is solely caused by those six scumbags. Not only would Young Master Linghu die because of that, it also made Doctor Ping lose great face from not being able to cure him and give a satisfactory answer to the one who entrusted him for the task, that's why he must punish these six scumbags to a great extent. Doctor Ping had planned to ask them to kill one of their brothers following their own oath, but he decided to show mercy and only ask them to wait upon Young Master Linghu."

She paused for a moment and then continued. "If these six scumbags do not follow Young Master Linghu's commands and Doctor Ping hears about it, he promises to kill one of them immediately."

"Since brother Linghu's injury was caused by us, it's really nothing that we wait upon him for a while. A true man knows when to pay back a favor and when to settle a score," Flower Fairy declared.

"A true man is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of friendship, much less waiting upon his injuries," Branch Fairy added.

"My wounds also need someone to wait upon. So I'll wait upon him and he will wait upon me. Back and forth, it's good for both of us," Fruit Fairy followed.

"Not mentioning that we can only wait upon him for a limited one hundred days. How short it is!" Trunk Fairy joined in.

Root Fairy smacked his own thigh loudly and said, "Even in the old days people could travel a thousand miles to help at the news of their friend's trouble. For us six brothers, did we ever hesitate to jump in troubles and help the needed...?"

Mrs. Ping shot a glance of disdain toward the six Fairies and then simply walked away. Branch Fairy and Trunk Fairy lifted the stretcher and leapt onboard. Root Fairy and the rest of the Fairies all followed. Then six voices shouted simultaneously, "Start the sail! Start the sail!"

By then, Linghu Chong knew that, for sure, they wouldn't be able to keep the six Fairies from going together with them, so he said, "Six Fairy brothers! I can let you come together with us, but you must show good manners to my Master and Master-Wife. This is my first order. If you don't do as I say, then I don't want you to wait upon me."

"We, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, have always been refined and courteous gentlemen. Everybody knows that. We will even show respects to your apprentice or your grand-apprentice, much less your Master and Master-Wife," Leaf Fairy replied.

Hearing that he had called himself a refined and courteous gentleman, Linghu Chong found himself greatly amused. He turned to Yue Buqun and said, "Master, these six Fairy brothers would like to board our boat and sail east with us. Do you think it's alright?"

Yue Buqun pondered. It seemed that, at least for now, these six wouldn't make things difficult for the Huashan School. With everybody else on the same boat, they still remained a serious hidden danger. But it was probably impossible to drive them away under the current circumstance. Fortunately these six men appeared to be mentally deranged despite the outstanding Kung Fu skills they possessed. So it wouldn't be entirely impossible to contain them by strategy. At that thought, he nodded.

"Alright. I guess they can take the boat with us if they insist. But I prefer a quiet life and would not want to listen to them argue back and forth non-stop."

"You've said it wrong, Mr. Yue," Branch Fairy argued. "Why do you think a person is born with a mouth? Other than eating, this mouth is also used to talk. And how about the two ears? Of course they are used to listen to people talking. If you prefer a quiet life, then you are really letting the Almighty Creator down for giving you a mouth and two ears."

Yue Buqun knew too well that if he had argued back, when the other five brothers' five mouths all joined in, that

would be like opening a can of worms, and there would be no end to it. He couldn't beat them in physical fight, nor would he be able to beat them in a word fight, so he simply let out a slight smile and then said, "Boatman, set sail!"

"Mr. Yue, didn't you just open your mouth to tell the boatman to set sail? If you really prefer a quiet life, you should have signaled him to set sail with a gesture," Leaf Fairy joined in.

"The boatman is at the back of the boat, and Mr. Yue is here in the middle section. If he had signaled yet the boatman couldn't see him, then it would still be useless," Trunk Fairy disagreed.

"Couldn't he have walked to the back of the boat and then signal the gesture?" Root Fairy suggested.

"What if the boatman couldn't understand his gesture and thought the 'set sail' command was the 'sink the boat' command? That would be terrible," Flower Fairy argued.

Amid the arguments from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, the boatman had weighed the anchor and set sail.

Both Yue Buqun and Madam Yue cast a glance at Linghu Chong spontaneously followed by a brief glance at the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. After exchanging some looks at each other, the Yue couple all had the same thought.

"Ping One-Finger mentioned that someone had entrusted him to treat Chong's injury. From his words, it seems that this person must have been someone with very high status in the Martial World, that was why Ping thought nothing of the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, yet was very polite to an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School. Who had entrusted Doctor Ping to treat Chong? Since Ping called Monk No Commandment a 'god damned idiot,' then obviously it wasn't Monk No Commandment."

In the old days, they would have called Linghu Chong over and asked him in detail, but unconsciously, much misunderstanding had emerged between the master and the apprentice. Both of them knew it was not yet the time to ask

Linghu Chong. When Madam Yue thought of that even Ping One-Finger, the number one doctor in the Martial World, couldn't cure Linghu Chong's injury and that he only had one hundred days left in his life, sadness welled up in her heart and tears streamed down her cheek.

Sailing with the wind and downstream, the boat traveled speedily. By evening, they were already not far from the town of Lanfeng. The boatman anchored the boat along the bank and soon had prepared dinner. Just when everyone was ready for supper, suddenly, loud voices came from ashore.

"Excuse me! May I ask if the heroes of the Huashan Sword School are on this boat?"

Before Yue Buqun had a chance to answer, Branch Fairy had already answered, "Heroes of both the Huashan Sword School and the Peach Valley's Six Fairies are all on this boat. What do you want?"

"Great! Great! We have been waiting here for an entire day and night. Hurry! Hurry up! Take those over!" the man replied gleefully.

Over a dozen hefty looking men walked out from a straw mat shed falling into two lines, each with a red-lacquered small case in his hands. An empty-handed man in a blue robe walked by the boat and bowed down.

"Our superior was very concerned when he heard that young hero Linghu was not feeling well. He really wanted to pay a visit himself but simply did not have enough time to make the trip back. So he sent me specific orders by homing pigeons and asked me to present some small gifts to young hero Linghu on his behalf."

One by one, the dozen of men walked aboard in a file and placed the over a dozen of cases down on the boat.

Utterly surprised, Linghu Chong couldn't help but ask, "I am Linghu Chong. May I ask who the respectful superior of yours is? I am afraid I am unworthy of such generous gifts."

"Young hero Linghu is a man of good fortunes. I am sure you will fully recover in no time. Please take care!" the man



replied. Bowing down respectfully, he led the bunch of men and walked away.

"I wonder who is sending me the gifts. This is so odd," Linghu Chong murmured.

The Peach Valley's Five Fairies could no longer hold their patience. "Let's open them up!" they acclaimed in unison and soon had opened all of the red-lacquered small cases. Some of the cases were filled with exquisite refreshments and pastry; some contained smoked chicken or ham that were great to go with wine; some held all kinds of expensive and precious medicinal materials such as ginseng, pilose antler, swallow nest, and tremella; the last two cases were filled with small gold and silver ingots, apparently for Linghu Chong to use along his trip. These were no small gifts at all! As soon as the Peach Valley's Five Fairies spotted the candies, cookies, candied fruits, and the pastries in the different cases, they wasted no time grabbing the treats and jamming them into their mouths. "This is delicious! So delicious!" they shouted cheerfully.

Linghu Chong checked the many cases carefully and thoroughly yet didn't find any notes, seals, or signs that would give out a trace of the gift-giver's identity.

"Master," Linghu Chong said to Yue Buqun, "I really can't figure this one out. These people seem to bear no ill will, and it doesn't look like that they are playing pranks on us either." Having said those words, he put some of the treats in front of his Master and Master-Wife respectfully before distributing the rest of them to his apprentice brothers and sisters.

Yue Buqun cast a glance at the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. They all had some of the treats, and none of them had any abnormal reactions from the food. It seemed that the food was not poisoned. So he asked Linghu Chong.

"Do you have any martial friends living in this area?"

"No." Linghu Chong shook his head after he pondered for a moment.

Sound of hoof beats suddenly rose. Eight riders dashed toward them along the river. Someone shouted among the riders.

"Is young hero Linghu of the Huashan Sword School over there?"

"Yes, yes! He's over here! What good stuff have you brought with you?" the Peach Valley's Six Fairies shouted cheerfully.

"Our chief heard that young hero Linghu had come to the town of Lanfeng. He also heard that young hero Linghu is quite fond of wine, so he told me to put together sixteen jars of excellent mellow wine and bring them here, so young hero Linghu can enjoy them on the boat along his trip," the man shouted back.

Soon, the eight riders had arrived, and sure enough, each saddle atop the horsebacks had two wine jars hanging from it. And on the wine jars, some wrote "Best Quality Royal-Wine," some wrote "High Grade Fen-Wine,"<sup>27</sup> and some others wrote "Shaoxing Red Wine."<sup>28</sup> These sixteen jars of wine turned out to have contained sixteen different types of wine. In Linghu Chong's mind, there was nothing else that could have been a better gift than these great wines. He hurried to the bow of the boat and then cupped his hands to salute.

"Please forgive my ignorance. Will you please tell me the name of your respectful clan? And what is your respectful name?"

"Our chief specifically told us again and again to not mention the name of our clan to young hero Linghu. He said that these are only very humble gifts. It's embarrassing enough. Why embarrass ourselves even more by mentioning our names?" the man answered with a grin. He waved a signal to his companions, and all the riders carried the many wine jars onto the boat.

Yue Buqun gazed at the eight men from within the boat's hold. Every one of them was vigorous and nimble. Carrying

one wine jar in each hand, they leapt aboard easily. None of the eight had any outstanding Kung Fu skills, and it was obvious that they were all from different Kung Fu schools. They must have been telling the truth when they said that they were members of a clan.

After sending the sixteen jars of wine aboard, the eight men bowed to Linghu Chong, jumped back onto their horses, and soon faded into the night.

"Master, how strange this is! I wonder who is playing a joke with me and sent me this many jars of wine," Linghu Chong grinned.

"Could it be Tian Boguang? Or could it be Monk No Commandment?" Yue Buqun murmured.

"Right!" Linghu Chong replied. "Those two tend to do things the odd way. Who knows, it might be them behind all these. Hey, Peach Valley's Six Fairies! We have so much great wine here. Aren't you going to have some?"

"Of course! Of course! We don't see any reason not to!" the Peach Valley's Six Fairies agreed wholeheartedly.

Root Fairy and Trunk Fairy each picked up a jar. After opening the seal, they poured the wine into bowls. The wonderful smell immediately filled the air. The six Fairies didn't even pretend to be polite to Linghu Chong, raising the bowls up and down, they began swallowing the great wine in big gulps.

Linghu Chong also filled a bowl with wine and took it to Yue Buqun.

"Master, please have some. This wine is not bad, indeed."

Yue Buqun slightly frowned and hummed.

"Master," Lao Denuo joined in, "taking precaution never hurts. We don't know who sent us these wines. Who knows if there's anything odd in these wines?"

Yue Buqun nodded in agreement. "Chong, we'd better be careful."

But once the wonderful smell of high quality wine had gone into Linghu Chong's nose, he could no longer hold his

craving.

"I won't be living much longer, anyway. It's no difference for me whether the wine was poisoned or not," he said with a grin.

Raising the bowl up with both hands, Linghu Chong poured all the wine in the bowl into his mouth and swallowed them in big gulps. "Great wine! Fabulous!" he praised.

Suddenly a voice came from ashore. Someone also praised loudly, "Great wine! Fabulous!"

Linghu Chong looked toward the direction the voice had come from and his eyes came upon a down and out scholar looking man in shabby clothes. The scholar had a torn folding fan in his right hand. Raising his head high, he sniffed again and again in the air, trying hard to catch as much of the great scent of wine as possible.

"Definitely great wine!" the scholar praised again.

"You haven't even tasted it, how would you know if the wine was good or bad, brother?" Linghu Chong asked with a grin.

"As soon as you smell the scent of the wine, you should have known that this is sixty-two year old High Grade Fen-Wine. Then undoubtedly it has to be great!" the scholar replied.

Linghu Chong had become quite an expert in the subject of wine thanks to the enthusiastic teachings from the Elder Bamboo-Green. He had already figured out that the wine was about sixty years old. But it would be simply impossible to be so sure that the wine was exactly sixty-two years old. The scholar must be exaggerating, he thought.

"If this brother doesn't mind, would you like to join us for some wine?" Linghu Chong invited with a smile.

"But you hardly know me at all," the scholar replied while wagging his head back and forth. "We have only met by chance like patches of drifting duckweed. I've already disturbed you enough by sniffing the scent of wine here. How

can I trouble you even further by drinking your wine? I really couldn't do that! I certainly couldn't do that!"

"The old saying said it well: We are all brothers within the four seas. From what you just said, I can tell that you must be an expert in the knowledge of wine. I'd love to consult you on some of the questions. Come aboard please! Don't be too modest," Linghu Chong invited again with a smile.

Hearing these words, the scholar strolled over slowly. After bowing down deeply, he said, "My surname is Zu, the same Zu that's in the word ancestor.<sup>29</sup> The famous Zu Di<sup>30</sup> in history who trained at the first crow of a cock was indeed a remote ancestor of mine. My first name is Qianqiu, which means a thousand years. This brother! May I ask what your respectful name is?"

"My surname is Linghu, and my first name is Chong," Linghu Chong replied.

"Great surname! Great surname! And your first name is great too!" Zu Qianqiu praised while walking aboard the boat from the springboard.

Linghu Chong was amused. "Just because I am inviting him for some wine, even my name is now a better name. Go figure!" he couldn't help thinking.

He filled a bowl with wine and then handed the bowl to Zu Qianqiu.

"Here you go! Enjoy!" he said.

Zu Qianqiu was a man in his fifties. He had a sallow face, a pair of listless eyes, and a brandy nose. Sparse beard occupied the lower half of his face. The front of his garment had many oil stains. When he extended his hands out, filth could clearly be seen under the fingernails of all his ten fingers. He was a thin man yet had a big belly that was totally out of proportion.

Seeing that Linghu Chong had handed over the bowl of wine, Zu Qianqiu didn't take it from him right away.

"Brother Linghu, although you have great wines, yet you don't have any good vessels of wine. What a great pity that

is!” he exclaimed.

“We are in the middle of a trip and only have a few rough bowls and cups. Mister Zu, you’ll just have to make do with them,” Linghu Chong replied.

“No way! No Way!” Zu Qianqiu shook his head and exclaimed. “Obviously you haven’t mastered the secret of the art of drinking; otherwise, you wouldn’t have been so careless about the vessels of wine. The art of drinking must have great regards to the vessels of wine. The kind of wine cup to use is very particular to what kind of wine you are drinking. If you are drinking Fen-Wine, then of course we have to use a Jade Cup. In the Tang Dynasty, a poet once wrote, ‘*Jade Cups bring about the light of amber.*’<sup>31</sup> Evidently a Jade Cup can help to perfect the color of the wine.”

“No doubt!” Linghu Chong agreed.

“Look at this jar of the Northeastern White-Wine,” Zu Qianqiu pointed at one of the wine jars and continued, “the flavor of the wine is excellent, but it lacks the sweet scent of good wine. You’d better drink it with a Rhino-horn Cup, which will make the wine taste just perfect. One should know that a Jade Cup will enhance the color of the wine and a Rhino-horn Cup will enhance the sweet scent of the wine. Our ancestors kid us not. Indeed!”

Back at Luoyang, Linghu Chong had listened to Elder Bamboo-Green teaching and explaining the subject of wine and had mastered a great deal of knowledge about the origin, the smell, the method of winemaking and storing procedures of the many kinds of famous wines, yet he knew nothing about wine vessels. And now when he listened to Zu Qianqiu speak with such fervor and assurance, he couldn’t help the feeling of suddenly seeing the light.

“As for Grape Wine, the answer is naturally the Luminous Cup. The ancients wrote in their poems, ‘*Wonderful Grape Wine filled the Luminous Cups; I want to drink but the sound of Pipa*<sup>32</sup> *is already calling me to my horseback.*’<sup>33</sup> Grape Wine has this gaudy kind of reddish color, which doesn’t

really promote the kind of heroic spirit us men should have shown when we drink it. But after we pour the Grape Wine into the Luminous Cup, the color of the wine is now no different from the color of blood. Drinking wine is almost like drinking blood. Yue Fei wrote in his poem, '*With soaring aspirations I eat my foe's flesh to rid my hunger; amid my talk and my smile I drink the enemy's blood to rid my thirst.*'<sup>34</sup> How brave and heroic!"

Linghu Chong nodded again and again. He had very little education in literature, so when he listened to Zu Qianqiu quoting various poems he wasn't very clear as to what each sentence really meant. But when he heard the last one, "*amid my talk and my smile I drink the enemy's blood to rid my thirst*", he agreed wholeheartedly that this line indeed showed ultimately heroic spirit between the words, and could invoke great inspiration from the listeners.

Zu Qianqiu pointed at another wine jar and went on. "As for Sorghum Wine, it is the most ancient wine in human history. Yidi invented the method of wine brewing back in the Xia Dynasty when Yu was the king.<sup>35</sup> Yu drank the wine and really loved the taste of it. Guess what? That wine was none other than this Sorghum Wine. Brother Linghu, ordinary people are so shortsighted. They only know that King Yu achieved a great deal in flood-control, which benefited the entire afterworld, but they didn't know that flood-control was so insignificant compared to the real accomplishment he had achieved. Do you know what his real accomplishment was?"

"Making Wine!" Linghu Chong and the Peach Valley's Six Fairies answered in unison.

"Precisely!" Zu Qianqiu confirmed, and all eight of them laughed out loud.

"To drink the Sorghum Wine, only a Bronze Jue<sup>36</sup> can bring out the ancient meaning of it," Zu Qianqiu continued. "And as for the Rice Wine, even though first-class Rice Wine has a fair taste, it lacks the appropriate amount of sweetness

and seems to be thin and weak. We ought to drink it with big ladlers to show the lofty quality.”

“I am just a man from the wilderness. I had no idea that the relationship between wine and wine vessels actually calls for such careful study,” Linghu Chong said.

Zu Qianqiu gave a gentle pat on a wine jar that had the words “Hundred-Grass Wine” written on it.

“In order to make the Hundred-Grass Wine, one must collect a variety of grasses and then soak them in top quality wine, that’s why it has a kind of faint, pleasant scent, the kind you would smell on a spring outing to the wilderness, that will make you tipsy even before you drink it. To drink the Hundred-Grass Wine, we ought to use an Age-old Rattan Cup. ‘Hundred-year-old rattan, carved into a cup, when used to drink the Hundred-Grass Wine, enhancing the wonderful fragrance it does.’”

“Hundred-year-old rattan, that had be precious,” Linghu Chong commented.

“Brother Linghu, you’ve said it wrong!” Zu Qianqiu disagreed with a stern countenance. “Compared to the hundred-year-old rattan, hundred-year-old wine is even more precious. Think about it, you can just go to a remote mountain area if you want to look for hundred-year-old rattan. But in regard to the hundred-year-old wine, everybody wants to drink it. After you drink it, it’s gone, yet even after you drink a thousand times using the Age-Old Rattan Cup, the cup is still there, nothing less, nothing more.”

“You are absolutely right! I am so very ignorant. Thank you for the advice,” Linghu Chong replied.

Throughout the entire time, Yue Buqun had paid great attention to Zu Qianqiu’s every single word. He could tell that Zu was definitely exaggerating, yet his words seemed reasonable. Seeing how Branch Fairy, Trunk Fairy, and the rest Fairies pick up the jar of Hundred-Grass Wine and splash it all over the table when they poured it, as if it were just



some kind of cheap wine, even though Yue Buqun was not fond of drinking, he could still smell the pure and nice aroma of the wine assailing his nostrils. He knew that the wine must have been top quality, and it was such a pity for the Peach Valley's Six Fairies to abuse it like that.

"And to drink the Shaoxing Red Wine, we ought to use an Ancient-china Cup," Zu Qianqiu went on explaining, "and it would be better to use a china cup from the Northern Song Dynasty. A china cup from the Southern Song Dynasty would be alright, but it certainly has the sign of waning. As for china cups from the Yuan Dynasty, they are inevitably uncouth.<sup>37</sup> And for the Pear-Blossom Wine of course it has to be the Emerald Cup. Bai Juyi wrote in his poem *Spring View of Hangzhou*, 'The red sleeves of the silk weaving girls reflected the persimmon leaves, and the emerald green flag of the wine shop sets off the Pear-Blossom Wine.'<sup>38</sup> Think about it, the wine shop in Hangzhou was selling the Pear-Blossom Wine and they had an emerald green flag hanging outside, which set off the Pear-Blossom Wine wonderfully. Then to drink the Pear-Blossom Wine, of course we have to use an Emerald Cup. And to drink the Jade-dew Wine, it ought to be the Glazed Cup. There are many small bubbles in the Jade-dew Wine, and only by drinking it with the crystal Glazed Cup can we appreciate the beauty of it."

"Toot toot toot! Aren't you just blowing your own trumpet!" a girl's voice suddenly rose. It was Yue Lingshan, who also made a face while speaking.

"Lingshan, don't be rude. What Mr. Zu said is very reasonable," Yue Buqun admonished.

"How can it be reasonable? Wine can add to the fun, and that's all it's good for. Drinking days and nights yet with so many rules, a true hero would never do that," Lingshan disagreed.

"Miss, you said it wrong!" Zu Qianqiu wagged his head back and forth. "Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty. Isn't he a great hero? If it weren't because he

became drunk and beheaded the white snake, how could he have established the Hang Dynasty that lasted several hundred years?<sup>39</sup> Isn't Fan Kuai a great hero? That day in the Banquet of Hongman, General Fan sliced the meat on his shield and drank the wine using a big ladler. Isn't that the true display of heroic spirits?"<sup>40</sup>

"Mister Zu, you know these are top quality wines, and you just mentioned that heroes also love drinking, then how come you are not drinking?" Linghu Chong asked with a grin.

"I've said it earlier. Without appropriate wine vessels we would just be abusing these great wines," Zu Qianqiu answered.

"You are really boasting in the most fantastic terms when you talked about the Emerald Cup, Luminous Cup, and whatever else," Trunk Fairy mocked. "Where are you going to find cups like that? Even if those cups do exist, there is probably only one or two apiece. Who's able to collect all of them?"

"An elegant gentleman, who has poetic temperament, who cares about savoring the great taste of wine, would, of course, have them. The way you guys drink is like cows or donkeys drinking out of a manger, then, of course, any kind of coarse cups or bowls would do for you," Zu Qianqiu mocked back.

"Are you an elegant gentleman?" Leaf Fairy challenged.

"Well, not too much, yet not too little, I do possess some quality of an elegant gentleman," Zu Qianqiu answered.

Leaf Fairy burst into loud laughter. "Then the kind of wine cups you just described for these eight kinds of wine, how many do you have with you?" he asked.

"Well, not too many, yet not too few, I do have one for each kind," Zu Qianqiu answered.

"Braggart! Braggart!" the Peach Valley's Six Fairies shouted in unison!

"How about a bet?" Root Fairy suggested. "If you have these eight kinds of wine cups with you, I'll eat them one by

one. What if you don't have them? What's that going to be?"

"Then I'll eat all these wine cups and bowls here on the table one by one, also, as a forfeit!" Zu Qianqiu vowed.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! Let's see how he is going to...," the Peach Valley's Six Fairies all cheered.

But before they even finished their sentence, Zu Qianqiu had already reached into his chest pocket and took out a wine cup. Tender and smooth, it turned out to be a Jade Cup.

Greatly astonished, the six Fairies swallowed the rest of the sentence back down their throats. Staring at Zu Qianqiu in shock, they watched him taking out one wine cup after another continuously. Among them were indeed the Emerald Cup, the Rhino-horn Cup, the Age-Old Rattan Cup, the Bronze Jue, the Luminous Cup, the Glazed Cup, and the Ancient-china Cup. After taking out these eight wine cups, Zu Qianqiu didn't stop and kept taking out more and more wine cups. There were the shining Golden Cup, the exquisitely carved Silver Cup, and the multicolored and naturally patterned Stone Cup. Furthermore, there were the Ivory Cup, the Tiger-tooth Cup, the Cowskin Cup, the Bamboo-tube Cup, the Rosewood Cup, and so on and so on. Some were large, and some were small; each looked different from the other ones. Everybody was dumbstruck; neither had expected that the poor and pedantic scholar had so many wine cups hidden in his chest pocket.

"What about it?" Zu Qianqiu asked Root Fairy in a perky voice.

Root Fairy's face saddened. "I lost! Fine, I'll eat eight wine cups," he said.

Picking up the Age-old Rattan Cup, Root Fairy bit it hard. Crack, the cup broke into two. He stuck the smaller half into his mouth, and after some loud chewing and crunching he swallowed the pieces down his throat.

Nobody had expected him to really eat the wine cup, and within seconds, he had already swallowed down half of the

wine cup. Everyone gasped in astonishment. Extending his arm out, Root Fairy reached for the Rhino-horn Cup this time.

Suddenly, Zu Qianqiu whisked with his left hand and struck toward Root Fairy's wrist. Root Fairy dropped his right hand slightly and then grabbed back at Zu Qianqiu's wrist to counter, but Zu Qianqiu flicked his middle finger swiftly toward Root Fairy's palm. Stunned, Root Fairy drew his arm back.

"Don't you want me to eat them?" he asked.

"I give up! You surely have got the fortitude. Let's just say you have already eaten all the eight wine cups. I'd rather keep my cups," Zu Qianqiu replied. Everybody laughed at these words.

Yue Lingshan had been quite scared of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, at first, but since they showed no sign of vicious or ruthless intentions throughout the time they were on the boat, instead, they always talked and behaved in a funny and affable manner, Yue Lingshan's fear slowly slipped away.

"Ahoy! Does that Age-old Rattan Cup taste any good?" she mustered up her courage and asked.

Root Fairy smacked his lips loudly and then lapped them with his tongue. "Yuck! What's good about it? It's too bitter!"

"Alas, you've really messed up my plan! You've eaten my Age-old Rattan Cup, what cup am I gonna use for the Hundred-Grass Wine now? Guess we'll just have to put up with a wooden cup." Zu Qianqiu frowned.

He took out a handkerchief from his chest pocket. Picking up what's left of the Age-old Rattan Cup, he began wiping it with the handkerchief. After a short while, he picked the Rosewood Cup up and also wiped it in and out. The handkerchief appeared to be damp and dirty, so the more he wiped the cup with it, the filthier the cup had become. After spending a good while wiping the wooden cup, he finally put the wooden cup back on the table. Lining all eight cups in a row, he put the rest of the wine cups back into his chest pocket and then began pouring the Fen-Wine, Grape Wine,

Shaoxing Red Wine, and the rest of the eight different kinds of wine into the eight cups. Then he let out a sigh of relief.

“Brother Linghu, please drink these eight cups of wine one by one. After you finish them, I’ll drink eight cups of wine to accompany you. Let’s savor them carefully and see how different they are from the kind of wine you used to have,” Zu Qianqiu invited.

“Sure!” Linghu Chong answered. He raised the wooden cup and then poured the wine down his throat in a single gulp. Suddenly, a strong flavor of pungency rose from his stomach and completely consumed him. In great shock, Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Why does the wine have such a peculiar taste?”

“These wine cups are truly the most valuable treasures of wine lovers,” Zu Qianqiu exclaimed. “I’ve met some cowards before who dared not to drink the second cup after tasting the strange flavor from the first cup. Through the ages, I yet have the chance to see one who had the courage to finish all eight cups of wine.”

“I don’t have many days to live anyway,” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “Even if the wines were poisoned, so what? It’s no different to die from poison. Why let him have an excuse to mock me?” So he picked up more cups from the table and drank two more cups of wine. One of them tasted utterly bitter while the other one tasted totally acerbic; neither tasted like good wine. At the time when he raised the fourth cup, Root Fairy suddenly uttered a cry.

“Oh, no! My stomach is burning! There’s fire inside my stomach.”

“You swallowed half of my Age-old Rattan Cup down, how could it not hurt?” Zu Qianqiu grinned. “The age-old rattan is as hard as steel. There’s no way you are going to digest that. You’d better take a lot of cathartic and hope you can get it out of your system. If that’s not gonna work, then you’d have no choice but to ask Killer Doctor Ping One-Finger to cut open your belly and take it out.”

A thought suddenly emerged in Linghu Chong's mind, "Something has gotten to be seriously wrong with those eight wine cups of his. After Root Fairy swallowed that Age-old Rattan Cup, even if the rattan were really that hard to digest, he should have suffered no more than some stomachache. Why would he get the burning sensation? Hum, a true man will look death calmly in the face. The more lethal his poison is the better. What am I afraid of?" At that thought, he slammed another cup of wine down his throat.

"Big apprentice brother, don't drink any more of those wines! They are probably poisonous." Yue Lingshan suddenly spoke out. "You blinded all those people with your sword, better be careful. It's very likely that they would plot against you for revenge."

"This Mister here is a man of the forthright kind. I am sure he won't be plotting against me," Linghu Chong said as a sad smile flashed across his lips. Deep in his heart, he actually wished that the wines were poisonous, so that they would kill him right after he drank them. "Would little apprentice sister feel the slightest sorrow when she sees my dying body right in front of her eyes?" he wondered as he drank another two cups of wine. The wine in the sixth cup tasted sour and salty, together with some kind of a stinking odor. The taste was not only far from the taste of great wine, it didn't even qualify the taste of wine. He couldn't help but frown.

Watching Linghu Chong drinking one cup after another by the side, Trunk Fairy was bursting to give it a try himself. "Let me have these two cups!" he pleaded and reached out for the seventh cup.

Zu Qianqiu waved his folding fan and smacked it at the back of Trunk Fairy's hand.

"Patience! Patience!" he urged with a grin. "You'll have to wait for your turn! Everyone will have to drink all eight cups in sequence to really appreciate the ultimate true taste of wine."

Trunk Fairy could tell that the smack from Zu Qianqiu's folding fan had carried a tremendous amount of force. If it had landed on the target squarely, the force probably was powerful enough to smash his bones. Flipping his palm over, he grabbed at the folding fan and shouted at the same time.

"I'd rather drink this one first! What are you going to do about it?"

Zu Qianqiu's folding fan had been folded into the shape of a short stick, but when Trunk Fairy's hand was just about to touch the fan, it suddenly opened up abruptly, and the edge of the fan shot swiftly toward Trunk Fairy's index finger. That caught Trunk Fairy by complete surprise. He drew his hand back hastily and the shot barely missed his finger, but numbness still came from his index finger as the force carried by the fan swept by. Crying out loud in shock, he took a step back.

"Brother Linghu, hurry up with those last two cups of wine!" Zu Qianqiu urged hurriedly.

Giving it no more thoughts, Linghu Chong also drank up the last two cups of wine. Neither of the two cups of wine had that stinking odor. But one was so spicy that it almost felt as if someone was slicing Linghu Chong's throat with a knife, while the other one had a very strong smell of herbal medicine. How could these be called wine when their flavors were even stronger than the strongest medicinal herb in the world?

Seeing the strange expression on Linghu Chong's face, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies burst with curiosity! "How does it taste after you drink all eight cups?" they asked eagerly.

"Eight cups all together, taste the ultimate wonder of the Heaven. That's recorded in ancient scripts," Zu Qianqiu rushed to answer before Linghu Chong had a chance.

"That's baloney! What ancient scripts?" Trunk Fairy rebuffed.

All of a sudden, four shadows leapt forward and each grabbed onto one of Zu Qianqiu's limbs. Nobody had a clue

as to what kind of odd signal Trunk Fairy must have given out that had prompted the sudden attack. The techniques of the Six Fairies were lightning fast yet utterly strange. When they suddenly charged at Zu Qianqiu completely out of the blue, even though Zu Qianqiu had excellent Kung Fu skills, himself, he still couldn't escape. Within a fraction of a second, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies had already lifted Zu Qianqiu off the ground by his four limbs. Having witnessed the terrifying scene when the Peach Valley's Six Fairies ripped Cheng Buyou into pieces, members of the Huashan School couldn't help but cry in terror. In the split second, an idea suddenly flashed by Zu Qianqiu's mind like a lightning. He shouted out loudly.

"The wine is poisonous! Don't you want the antidote?"

The four Fairies that had grabbed onto Zu Qianqiu's four limbs all had quite some wine. At the words "the wine is poisoned," they were all seized by surprise.

That brief hesitation from the four Fairies was exactly what Zu Qianqiu needed. "Farts! Farts!" he cried out loudly.

The four Fairies only felt that something all of a sudden started to slip away from their grips. A loud exploding sound followed immediately after. The next thing they know was that a big hole suddenly emerged in the boat's mat roofing and Zu Qianqiu had escaped through the opening. Both Root Fairy and Branch Fairy found themselves empty-handed while Flower Fairy had a stinking sock and Leaf Fairy had a stinking and muddy shoe in their hands. The Peach Valley's Five Fairies also moved speedily. Everyone on the boat only saw a blur and the five had already leapt ashore. But Zu Qianqiu seemed to have vanished into thin air. Just when the five Fairies were about to chase after him using their Qing-Gong techniques, they heard somebody yelling from the far end of the street.

"Zu Qianqiu, you god damned rascal! Give me back my pills! If any pill is missing, I'll rip all your tendons out and skin you alive!" the man yelled loudly as he dashed closer.



Hearing someone trashing Zu Qianqiu like that, the five Fairies felt great satisfaction and all decided to give up the chase, so they could take a good look at this man who would truly deserve to be called a friend. Standing still, all five of them stared toward the newcomer curiously.

A meatball rolled toward them, panting heavily along the way. Only after it finally rolled almost right next to the five Fairies were they able to recognize that the meatball was actually a man. The man was too short and too fat. It would be even generous to call him a human. He had no neck. His broad and oblate shaped head just sat on his shoulders directly as if somebody had smashed his head with a hammer at the time when he was born, which squashed his head down and stretched his cheeks, mouth, and nose horizontally.

No one could help but laugh inwardly, thinking, "That Ping One-Finger is also a short fatty, but he would certainly pale into insignificance by comparison with this fellow."

Ping One-Finger was short with an ultra-broad shoulder, but this man also had ultra-thick chest and back. And on top of that, his arms and legs were so short as if he only had the lower arm but without the upper arm and the belly without the underbelly.

The man walked in front of the boat with arms akimbo and then asked arrogantly as if he had the ultimate seniority, "Where is Zu Qianqiu the dirty rascal hiding?"

"That dirty rascal ran away. He surely runs fast! I bet you won't be able to catch up with him rolling so slowly like that," Root Fairy answered with a grin.

The man shot a glare at Root Fairy with his small and circular eyes and let out a grunt. But suddenly he started yelling again.

"My pills! My pills!"

Giving the ground a hard stamp, the meatball sprang onto the boat and then rolled into the boat's hold. He first sniffed around a little before picking up an empty wine cup

on the table and then put it next to his nose to breathe in. Suddenly, his complexion changed dramatically. Not very complementary to start with, now after the change, his face had transformed into something completely grotesque and impossible to describe in words. Apparently his grievance had reached the extreme. He picked the rest seven cups up one after another and gave each one a good snuffle before murmuring, "My pills!" After he said "my pills" eight times, the sorrow on his face looked so sad that no one could even bare to look into his face. Suddenly he flopped down onto the floor and burst into loud cries.

The Peach Valley's Five Fairies became even more curious. They gathered around the man in a circle and all started talking at once.

"Why are you crying?"

"Did Zu Qianqiu bully you?"

"Don't feel bad. We'll find this dirty rascal and rip him into four pieces to vent your anger."

"My pills are gone. He blended my pills in his wine and drank all of them. Even if I could kill...kill this dirty rascal, it's already...already...too late," the man replied in sobs.

Linghu Chong suddenly thought of something. "What kind of pills are they?" he asked.

"It took me a total of twelve years to collect the thousand-year old Ginseng, Tuckahoe, Glossy Ganoderma, Pilose Antler of young stags, Polygonum Multiflorum, Bear Gallbladder, Pseudo-Ginseng, Muskiness, and other precious medicaments. Then after nine steps of braising and nine times of solarization, I was finally able to refine those "Life-Extending Eight Pills" that had the power of bringing the dying back to life. But who had expected that god damned Zu Qianqiu would steal them from me and then blend them in the wine for a drink?" He shed some more tears.

Linghu Chong was astonished. "Do these eight pills of yours taste the same?" he asked.

"Of course not. Some had a stinking odor, some tasted extremely bitter. Some were so spicy that you'd almost feel like a knife had just slit your throat, and some had a strong flavor of pungency, so strong that you'd think you were on fire. If anyone takes the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills,' then no matter how bad his internal wounds or external wounds are, for sure he would come back to life," the man explained.

"Oh, no!" Linghu Chong cried as he struck his thigh with his palm. "That Zu Qianqiu stole your Life-Extending Eight Pills, but he didn't take them himself. Instead...instead..."

"Instead what?" the man asked.

"Instead, he blended them in the wine and then fooled me into drinking all of them down with the wine. I had no idea that the wine had contained precious medicinal pills. I actually thought he had poison in the wine," Linghu Chong replied.

"Poison in the wine? Poison my ass!" the man cursed in fury. "Did you really take my Life-Extending Eight Pills?" he asked, his eyes blazing.

"Zu Qianqiu filled eight cups with good wines for me to drink. Some did taste very bitter, and some did have a terrible odor, some surely felt like somebody slit my throat, and some did have a burning sensation. But to be very honest with you, I didn't see any pills at all," Linghu Chong explained.

The man shot a nasty glare toward Linghu Chong and his fat face twitched again and again. All of a sudden, he uttered a loud cry as he sprang onto his feet and then charged at Linghu Chong.

Ever since the man put a wicked look on his face, the Peach Valley's Five Fairies had been watching out for him. So as soon as he sprang off the floor, four out of the five Fairies had reached their hands out in blazing speed and each grabbed hold of one of his four limbs.

"Don't hurt him!" Linghu Chong shouted out in a hurry.

But the strange thing was that after the four Fairies had grabbed onto his two wrists and two ankles, his four limbs actually retracted toward his torso and he looked even more like a meatball. In great surprise, the four Fairies gave a loud shout and then pulled harder. The more they pulled, the longer the man's four limbs extended, and soon his upper arms and thighs all extended out from within his body just like when a tortoise's four limbs were extending out from within the shell.

"Don't hurt him!" Linghu Chong shouted again.

The Peach Valley's Four Fairies relaxed the pulling a little bit. The man's four limbs immediately retracted back and he became a meatball, once again.

"This is so interesting! This is so interesting! What kind of Kung Fu is this?" Fruit Fairy shouted out loudly while still lying on the stretcher.

The Peach Valley's Four Fairies gave it a good pull, and the man's arms and legs again went a few feet longer. Yue Lingshan and the bunch of female apprentices simply couldn't help but giggle by the side.

"Hey, don't you think you look more handsome this way when we stretch your arms, legs, and your body longer?" Root Fairy joked.

"Oh, no!" the man screamed.

"Why?" the Peach Valley's Four Fairies asked in shock, and naturally their grips relaxed slightly from the distraction.

The man suddenly pulled hard and his limbs slipped out from the four Fairies' grips. In the echoing of a loud bang, he had cracked open a large hole in the bottom of the boat and escaped into the river. Everyone cried in astonishment, and water instantly gushed out of the hole and into the boat.

"Get the luggage and jump ashore," Yue Buqun shouted the order.

The hole on the bottom of the boat was about four feet long and four feet wide. Water gushed in very quickly and only moments later, the water in the boat's cabin had already

risen to knee's high. Fortunately, the boat was next to the bank and everyone made it ashore safely. Watching the boat sink slowly under the water, the boatman didn't know what to do and only froze there looking dreadfully worried.

"Don't be troubled. How much is your boat worth? We'll pay you double that," Linghu Chong comforted him. In the meantime, he was deeply puzzled, "I have never met Zu Qianqiu before. Why would he steal these precious medicinal pills and then trick me into taking them?" He tried to slightly redirect his inner energy. A warm feeling rose from his lower stomach, but the eight energy streams still roamed about inside him uncontrollably.

Lao Denuo found another boat to hire and directed people to load the luggage onto the boat. Linghu Chong took out a few of the silver ingots, the ones he had received earlier and had no clue as to who they had come from, and then gave them to the boatman who had lost the boat.

Yue Buqun found himself full of unease at what had happened. It seemed that there were simply too many eccentrics around here. None of the people who had visited had been very frank with them, and accidents just kept happening one after another. It would be the best for them to leave this troubled place as soon as possible. But since it was completely dark already, and it would be too risky to sail in the torrential river at night, he had to temporarily hold on to that thought and rested in the boat for the night.

And as regard to the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, having failed twice to secure their prisoners and letting Zu Qianqiu and the Meatball Man escape one after another, they certainly had a hard time. This was something that had never happened to them before. So being the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, the six brothers kept blowing their own trumpet and tried hard to prettify themselves from the incidents. After some great efforts and still failing to justify themselves, very unhappily, they drank some wine and finally went to bed themselves.



# **Chapter 15: Medicine**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**The girl was about seventeen years old. Her bloodless face rested on the pillow, and her long hair spread over the blanket. "Dad!" said she in a dim voice, yet without opening her eyes.**

Yue Buqun lay in the cabin. Sound of the river waves beating the shore echoed in his ears as his many thoughts also whirled around in his head. Slowly, he fell into a state of ooziness when suddenly something caught his attention – the sounds of footsteps coming closer and closer from ashore. Sitting up from his bed, he looked out through a crack of the window. Under the misty moonlight he could vaguely see two shadows running towards the boat from afar. One of them raised his right hand, and at that signal, both of them stopped, still dozens of feet away from the boat. Knowing that the two of them would undoubtedly be talking in whispers, Yue Buqun started loading his “Divine Art of the Violet Twilight”, and instantly his sense of vision and hearing sharpened dramatically and the distance he could see and hear increased considerably.

“That’s the boat,” one of the men whispered. “I made a mark on the mat of the boat earlier. Right after that old fellow from the Huashan School hired the boat. It’s gotten to be it.”

“That’s great! Let’s report back to Uncle-Master Zhu then. Senior apprentice brother, when did our ‘Hundred-Toxic Faction’ start a feud with the Huashan School? Why is Uncle-Master Zhu going through so much trouble to intercept them in such a big way?” the other one asked in whispers.

As soon as Yue Buqun heard the words “Hundred-Toxic Faction,” his heart skipped a beat as a slight chill shot down his spine. Because of the slight distraction, the power of the “Divine Art of the Violet Twilight” decreased, and all he could pick out were pieces of words from the conversation.

“...not intercepting...Uncle Master Zu owed someone a favor, and that someone has asked him to inquire about somebody...it wasn’t...” the previous one replied.

The man spoke in such a low voice that Yue Buqun could only hear fractions of the sentence and couldn't put the meaning of the words together. By the time he reloaded his "Divine Art of the Violet Twilight," all he heard were sounds of footsteps descending further and further. The two men had faded into the darkness.

"How did our Huashan School start a feud with the 'Hundred-Toxic Faction'?" Yue Buqun thought to himself. "That Uncle-Master Zhu they mentioned most probably is the Head Master of the 'Hundred-Toxic Faction.' This man has a nickname called 'Non-lethal Man.' It is said that this man possesses outstanding skills in the art of poisoning. To kill someone with poison is simple. Anybody can achieve that easily. But when this man poisons someone, the victim won't die, instead, he will feel such great torment as if he has been cut thousands of times or as if there are tens of thousands of bugs chewing and feasting on his flesh. The misery is going to be so immense that the victim would have been better off dead, yet he won't even have enough strength left to commit suicide and would have no other choice but to suffer more. Together with the 'Five-Sylph Sect' in Yunnan Province, the 'Hundred-Toxic Faction' has been named the Ultimate Two Poisonous Clans in the Martial World. Although it is said that the 'Hundred-Toxic Faction' is still inferior to the 'Five-Sylph Sect,' it is certainly no trivial matter. Why would this Master Zhu give me trouble in a big way? Who has asked him to do it?"

Yue Buqun pondered the question over and over but could only come up with two explanations: number one, Feng Buping of the Sword-Branch must have asked the Hundred-Toxic Faction to give trouble to him; number two, among the fifteen assassins Linghu Chong had blinded, someone must have been friends with the Hundred-Toxic Faction.

Suddenly a girl's whispering voice from ashore caught his attention.

“Does your family really have that whatever ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript’ after all?”

It was the voice of his daughter – Yue Lingshan. Yue Buqun didn’t even have to listen on to figure out whom she was talking to. It of course had to be Lin Pingzhi. They must have sneaked ashore earlier sometime. Yue Buqun suddenly realized that his daughter’s feelings towards Lin Pingzhi had been growing day after day lately. The two dared not show their affection during the day, afraid that people would make fun of them; so instead, they went ashore for a date late at night. If it weren’t because he had detected enemy coming ashore and used his “Divine Art of the Violet Twilight” to spy on them, this would have certainly slipped by him. To load the “Divine Art of the Violet Twilight” would exhaust a good amount of inner energy. He wouldn’t have used it under ordinary circumstances. He certainly didn’t expect to find his daughter’s little secret together with the origin of the enemy? Then he heard Lin Pingzhi’s voice.

“We do have the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Art’ and I’ve shown you the moves several times. But we really don’t have the sword art manuscript.”

“Then why do your grandpa and your two uncles keep suspecting big apprentice brother for embezzling your sword art manuscript?” Yue Lingshan asked.

“Well, they suspected him, but I didn’t,” Lin Pingzhi answered.

“Humph, how convenient! Let others suspect for you and save yourself the trouble,” Yue Lingshan said.

“If my family really had some kind of brilliant sword art manuscript, our Fortune Prestige Escort House wouldn’t have been bullied so much by the Qingcheng Sword School and my family wouldn’t have been broken up.” Lin Pingzhi sighed.

“That’s true. Then when your grandpa and your uncles suspected big apprentice brother, why didn’t you defend him against the charge?” Yue Lingshan asked.

"I didn't hear my mom and dad's words with my own ears. I wouldn't have any ground to defend him from," Lin Pingzhi argued.

"So you do suspect big apprentice brother after all," Yue Lingshan concluded.

"Don't say that. If big apprentice brother hears this, it will certainly hurt the brotherhood of fellow apprentices," Lin Pingzhi suggested.

"Why do you have to put up so much affectation?" Yue Lingshan sneered. "Either you do suspect him or you don't. If I were you, I'd have asked big apprentice brother a long time ago." She paused for a second and then spoke again. "You are so much like my father. Both of you suspect big apprentice brother in your hearts and believe that he had embezzled your family's sword art manuscript...."

"Master suspects him, too?" Lin Pingzhi intercepted.

"If you don't suspect him, why did you use the word 'too'? Didn't I say that your personality is almost identical to my father's? Both of you keep your thoughts to yourself but never speak it out directly." Yue Lingshan chuckled.

Suddenly, a croaked voice roared from the boat right next to the boat of the Huashan members.

"You shameless scoundrels! What a bunch of crap! Linghu Chong is a true hero. Why would he want your god damned sword art manuscript? Do you know what kind of lowlifes I hate the most? The kind that talks garbage behind one's back!"

His voice exploded like thunders from the sky. Not only were passengers from the many boats along the river bank waken up, even the many birds sleeping on the tree branches along the river bank were startled and began chirping loudly. Immediately following the shout, a huge shadow leapt out of the boat and glided toward Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan rapidly.

Neither Lin Pingzhi nor Yue Lingshan had brought a sword when they came ashore, so both of them could only

rush to defend themselves with kicks and punches. As soon as Yue Buqun heard the man's roar, he could tell that this man must have had resourceful inner energy. And the leap and the glide the man demonstrated clearly showed that he possessed first-class Kung Fu skills. Seeing that the man had launched the attack against his daughter, Yue Buqun shouted out in desperation.

"Please, show mercy!"

Hastily, Yue Buqun threw himself at the window and crashed through it to leap toward the riverbank. Still in the mid air, he could already see that the giant man had grabbed hold of both Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan and darted forward with one in each hand.

Yue Buqun was astounded. As soon as his right foot touched the ground, he dashed forward using his Qing-Gong techniques at once. Wielding a move named "White Aurora Shooting the Sun," he thrust his sword toward the man's back.

The man had a very big and tall body, so of course his steps were much bigger than average. He took a step forward and the stab from Yue Buqun was out of range. Without any delay, Yue Buqun followed with a move called "Zhong-Ping Sword" and shot his blade forward a second time. The giant man just happened to take another giant step forward, and once again the attack missed the target.

"Look out!" Yue Buqun let out a crisp roar and shouted out as he stabbed his sword out swiftly using a move named "Cool Breeze Brings Comfort."

When the tip of the blade was within one foot from the man's back, suddenly, a strong wind embraced Yue Buqun as someone charged against him from the side, poking two fingers towards his eyes viciously. It was at the end of the street; a row of houses by the street blocked the moonlight and cast a long shadow on the street. Yue Buqun quickly turned his body aside and dodged the attack. Swinging his long sword with an angle, he sliced the blade out as his

counterattack before even catching a glimpse of the enemy. The attacker lowered his head and then stepped forward with a clawed hand striking towards Yue Buqun's Zhong-Wan Acupoint on his stomach. Yue Buqun threw a front kick. The man spun around and struck toward his back. Without turning back, Yue Buqun shot a speedy thrust backward with a backhand, but the man dodged the thrust once again and then charged forward to punch at Yue Buqun's chest. Yue Buqun was infuriated. How dare this man be so disrespectful to fight his long sword with bare hands yet using all attacking moves? In the fury, he made a circular motion with the sword and then poked upward all of a sudden toward the enemy's forehead. In a rush, the man flicked the sword with his finger, which changed the direction of the poke slightly. Following the flow of the force Yue Buqun turned the poke into a slice, and with a slight tearing sound he had chopped the man's hat off, exposing a shaven head. The man turned out to be a monk. Blood gushed down from his head; obviously, the slice had injured him. Giving the ground a hard push, the monk leapt backward hastily.

Seeing that he fled in the opposite direction from the giant who kidnapped Yue Lingshan, Yue Buqun didn't chase after him. By then Madam Yue had caught up with him, sword in her hand.

"Where's Lingshan?" she asked distractedly.

"This way!" Yue Buqun pointed with his left hand and the couple immediately chased on following the road the giant had taken. But soon the road intersected with many other roads and they couldn't tell which way the enemy had taken.

"What now! What now!" Madam Yue cried in despair.

"The man that kidnapped Lingshan is a friend of Chong. I suppose he...he won't go so far as to hurt Lingshan. Let's go ask Chong to find out more about it," Yue Buqun suggested.

"That's right. That man shouted out loud saying that Lingshan and Pingzhi were defaming Chong. I wonder what made him say that." Madam Yue nodded.

"It's about the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' again," Yue Buqun explained.

When the Yue couple arrived back at the riverbank, they found Linghu Chong and the many apprentices all standing by the river looking deeply concerned. After Yue Buqun and Madam Yue walked back into the middle cabin and were just about to send for Linghu Chong for further inquiries, a voice suddenly rose in a distance from ashore.

"Here's a letter for Yue Buqun."

Lao Denuo and a few male apprentices unsheathed their swords immediately and leapt back ashore. Only moments later, Lao Denuo returned to the cabin and reported.

"Master, we found this piece of cloth under a rock on the ground. The messenger left before we got there." He presented the piece of cloth.

Yue Buqun picked the cloth up and took a good look at it. The cloth was apparently torn from a robe, and someone had written some tremulous words in blood using his finger. It read, "We'll return your stinking daughter on the Five-Tyrant Ridge."

"That monk wrote this," handing the cloth over to his wife, Yue Buqun claimed dryly.

"Whose...whose blood is this?" Madam Yue asked anxiously.

"Don't worry. I gave him a cut on the forehead," Yue Buqun comforted her. He turned to the boatman and asked, "How far are we from the Five-Tyrant Ridge?"

"If we set sail early in the morning, after the Copper-Tile Town and the Jiuhe Town, it's Dongming Town. The Five-Tyrant Ridge is to the east of Dongming next to Heze. It's right on the border between Henan province and Shandong province. If misters want to go there, we can probably get there by dusk tomorrow," the boatman answered.

Yue Buqun answered with a hum as he thought to himself, "They are asking me to meet them on the Five-Tyrant Ridge. This is an appointment I simply can't refuse. But who

knows how many people they will have there. Besides, they have Lingshan in their hands. I guess this is a battle I am destined to lose." He couldn't help but hesitate.

Suddenly someone shouted from ashore. "Peach Valley's Six Goblins, you damn buttheads, I am your lord Zhong Kui<sup>41</sup> here to hunt you bunch of goblins down."

There was simply no way the Peach Valley's Six Fairies would be taking those words lightly. All six of them instantly cursed back with streams of abuses. Except for Fruit Fairy who couldn't move, the remaining five Fairies all leapt ashore without any delay. What they saw was a man with a needle hat holding a long narrow white banner.<sup>42</sup> At the sight of the five Fairies, the man turned around immediately and started running away.

"Peach Valley's Six Goblins are all cowards! I dare you to come after me," he shouted without slowing down his steps.

Bellowing furiously, Root Fairy and the rest of the four Fairies darted after the man. But the man certainly had first-class Qing-Gong skills. Within seconds, the six of them had been swallowed by the darkness.

At the time, Yue Buqun and the many Huashan School members had all come ashore. Suddenly Yue Buqun shouted.

"This is a trick to lure us away. Get back to the boat right away, everybody."

Right at the moment, a ball shaped shadow suddenly rolled out from nowhere and grabbed onto Linghu Chong's collar in a swift maneuver.

"You come with me!" he shouted. It was none other than that meatball man.

In his tight grips, Linghu Chong had no way of defending himself. Suddenly, another man dashed out from behind a street corner and threw a flying kick toward the meatball man. It was Branch Fairy. Turned out that after he chased after the man with the needle hat for a few hundred feet, he suddenly remembered that his brother Fruit Fairy was still onboard. Afraid that his brother might be taken away by that



god damned "Lord Zhong Kui," he rushed back in guard. And when he saw that the meatball man had taken Linghu Chong prisoner, he immediately rushed over in rescue.

The meatball man instantly dropped Linghu Chong and, in a flash, had entered the cabin and leapt by Fruit Fairy's bed. Lifting his right foot, he assumed a posture of stepping down on Fruit Fairy's chest.

"Don't hurt my brother!" Branch Fairy shouted in shock.

"Old Man is calling the shot here. Why do I have to listen to you?" the meatball man mocked.

Wasting no time, Branch Fairy leapt into the cabin and with a quick pull, he had both Fruit Fairy and the bedplate in his arms. That was exactly what the meatball man had wanted - to draw him away from Linghu Chong. Leaping back ashore speedily, he had Linghu Chong in his grips once again. Throwing Linghu Chong onto his shoulders, he ran away in a scoot.

Branch Fairy suddenly remembered. Ping One-Finger had asked them, the five brothers, to take good care of Linghu Chong, and now Linghu Chong had just been kidnapped. How would they ever justify themselves to Ping One-Finger? Certainly, Doctor Ping would ask them to kill Fruit Fairy as the punishment. But if he left Fruit Fairy unattended, how would Fruit Fairy be able to defend himself at all in his injured state if any enemy were to attack him? At that thought, he held Fruit Fairy in his arms and chased after the meatball man, at once.

Yue Buqun waved a beckon to his wife. "You take care of the apprentices. I'll go take a look," he said.

Madam Yue nodded. Both of them knew too well that with so many tough enemies hidden in the dark, if both of them were to chase after the enemy, perhaps all the apprentices would be in harm's way.

The meatball man's Qing-Gong was really far less than that of the Branch Fairy, but with Linghu Chong on his shoulder, he was able to run with all his might, while Branch

Fairy didn't want to risk aggravating Fruit Fairy's wounds and had to carry Fruit Fairy with both arms while running in steady steps, thus simply couldn't gain any distance in the chase. Yue Buqun also used his Qing-Gong techniques and gradually caught up with them. Then, he was able to pick out Branch Fairy's shouting voice, bellowing again and again, demanding the meatball man to let Linghu Chong go, or else, he wouldn't let it go at that. Even though Fruit Fairy couldn't move his body, he definitely didn't want to give his mouth a rest and kept arguing with Branch Fairy along the way.

"Even if you really can catch up with him, none of our other brothers are here, what'cha gonna do? And if there's nothing you can do about it, what you just said, that you wouldn't let it go at that, is only bluffing then," he said.

"Even if I am bluffing, it will at least scare the enemy and slow him down. It's still better than not bluffing," Branch Fairy argued.

"Can't you tell that the meatball is still maintaining a good running speed and is not slowing down at all? I don't think your bluffing is getting us anywhere," Fruit Fairy mocked.

"Well, he hasn't slowed down yet, but trust me, he will slow down after a while," Branch Fairy disagreed. Even with Fruit Fairy in his arms and while debating endlessly, he was still able to maintain his speed and showed no sign of slowing down.

One after another, running in a straight line, the three of them kept running toward the northeast, and the road gradually turned into a rugged and rough mountain path.

Yue Buqun suddenly thought of something. "If the meatball man had set up an ambush here in the valley, and as soon as I run into their trap, the many elite fighters suddenly launch an all out attack, it would be extremely dangerous."

At the thought, he slowed down and pondered over the possibilities, meanwhile, the meatball man had run toward a

house by the hillside and quickly climbed over a wall into the house. After a quick check around, Yue Buqun resumed the chase. By then, carrying Fruit Fairy in his arms, Branch Fairy had also climbed over the wall and went in. Suddenly he uttered a loud cry, apparently falling into some kind of a trap. Yue Buqun sneaked closer to the wall and then heard Fruit Fairy's voice.

"Didn't I tell you before to watch out for yourself? See, you just wouldn't listen to me. Well, I guess you like being trapped in this fishing net like a big fish!"

"First of all, it's TWO big fish, not A big fish. Secondly, when the hell did you tell me to watch out?" Branch Fairy said sulkily.

"Remember that time we went to that courtyard to steal guavas on the tree when we were still kids, and I told you to watch out for yourself. Don't you remember?" Fruit Fairy reminded him.

"That was like thirty years ago. What has that gotten anything to do with right now?" Branch Fairy disputed.

"Of course it does. That time you were so careless and fell off the tree. Then you got caught and took a good beating. Only after big brother, second brother, fourth brother, and fifth brother came by in time were they able to rescue you and kill that entire family. Now you are being careless again and got caught again," Fruit Fairy said.

"What's the big deal? At the most we'll just have to wait till the rest of our brothers get here and kill this entire family, once again," Branch Fairy replied.

"Humph, you two Peach Valley's Goblins, even just moments before your own death you are still thinking about killing people. Now shut the hell up and spare my ears some peace," the meatball man said in a chilling tone. Some muffled voices from Branch Fairy and Fruit Fairy followed and soon they both fell silent. Apparently the meatball man had placed some kind of anesthetics in their mouth to shut them up.

Yue Buqun inclined his head and listened warily for a good while, but all he heard was silence on the other side of the wall. He crept closer to the wall and found a big jujube tree right next to the wall, so he gently leapt up the jujube tree and then looked inside. A small hut stood about a dozen feet from the wall. Since Branch Fairy fell into the fishing net right after he climbed over the wall, Yue Buqun figured that the space between the hut and the wall most probably had all kinds of booby traps. Hiding himself behind the dense leaves of the jujube tree, he loaded the "Divine Art of Violet Twilight" and listened carefully.

The meatball man set Linghu Chong down in a chair. "How the hell are you related to Zu Qianqiu that old rascal?" he asked in a low and deep tone.

"I've only met Zu Qianqiu the first time today. Why should I be related to him?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Even now you are still lying!" the meatball man roared angrily. "Don't forget that you are in my hands now. I guarantee you a most miserable death."

"I accidentally ate your precious catholicon. It's only natural that you are mad at me. But to be honest with you, I really doubt that your pills are as great as how you have described them. See, after I took them, there's no improvement at all," Linghu Chong answered with a grin.

"What made you think the result has to be immediate?" the meatball man rebuffed angrily. "The common saying says, 'Illness comes in overwhelming force as if a mountain has collapsed, but will only recede little by little as if reeling the silk thread off a cocoon.' Only after ten to fifteen days will the medicine show its efficacy."

"Then how about we wait ten to fifteen days to find out?" Linghu Chong suggested.

"How about you kiss my ass? You ate my 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' on the sly. Old Man is gonna waste you right now," the meatball man roared furiously.

"But if you waste me right now, then my life would have ended right now. That just proves that your 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' doesn't extend life after all." Linghu Chong grinned.

"I am killing you. It has nothing to do with the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills'," the meatball man replied.

"If you are going to kill me, help yourself. I have no strength left in me and am incapable of self-defense, anyhow." Linghu Chong sighed.

"Humph, you want it quick? It's not gonna be that easy. But I have to straighten something out first. God damn it! Zu Qianqiu is my decades-long friend. There has gotten be a good reason behind this that made him betray me. Your Huashan School is worthless in the eyes of the 'Old Ancestor of the Yellow River,' so of course he didn't steal my 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' for you just because you are an apprentice of the Huashan School. How odd! Really odd!" While talking to himself, he stamped his feet to the floor angrily.

"Oh, I see. So your nickname is 'Old Ancestor of the Yellow River.' Sorry I didn't know you before," Linghu Chong said.

"Nonsense! How can I be the 'Old Ancestor of the Yellow River' all by myself?" the meatball man chided.

"Why can't you?" Linghu Chong asked curiously.

"One is surnamed Old and the other is surnamed Zu.<sup>43</sup> It of course takes two to make up the 'Old Ancestor of the Yellow River.' You can't even figure this out. What a moron! I am Old Lord, Old Man, and he is Zu Ancestor, Zu Qianqiu. Since we both live by the Yellow River, that's why we are called the 'Old Ancestor of the Yellow River'."

"Why is one called Old Lord and the other one Zu Ancestor?" Linghu Chong couldn't help but ask.

"That's because you are too ignorant and don't know that there are surnames like Old or Zu. My last name is Old, my middle name is 'Lord,' and my first name is 'Man.' So when

others call my name, they either call me Old Lord, or Old Man...," the meatball man explained.

Linghu Chong simply couldn't help himself and burst into laughter.

"I bet that Zu Qianqiu's middle name is Ancestor then," he said.

"Of course," the meatball man Old Man answered. He paused for a moment and then muttered in surprise, "What? You don't even know Zu Qianqiu's name? Then maybe you are not related to him. Well...wait, are you Zu Qianqiu's son?"

"How the heck did you get that idea? His surname is Zu, and my surname is Linghu. How did you mix that up?" Linghu Chong found this even funnier.

"How bizarre! I went through so much painstaking effort, by hook or by crook, and finally was able to make the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' so I can use them to cure my darling daughter's illness. If you aren't Zu Qianqiu's son, why would he steal my precious pills to feed you?" Old Man muttered to himself.

By then, Linghu Chong finally became aware. "So these pills of yours, Mister Old, are for your daughter's illness. I am so, so sorry that I had taken them by mistake. May I ask what kind of illness does your daughter have? Why don't you ask the 'Killer Doctor' Doctor Ping to treat her?"

"Pah! Pah!" Old Man spat in aversion. "Consult Ping One-Finger when one has hard-to-cure disease, of course I know that. I live here in Kaifeng, you dummy! He has this rule that after he cures one, another one must be killed to even the numbers. In order to get him to treat my daughter, I went ahead and killed the entire family of five of his in-laws. By then he finally couldn't reject and devoted himself in diagnosing my daughter's disease. He found out that even before my daughter was born, she already had this weird disease, so he prescribed the instruction for the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' for me. Otherwise how the heck would I know how to make the eight pills?"

The more Linghu Chong heard, the more surprised he felt. "If senior master you wanted Doctor Ping to treat your daughter, why did you kill his in-law's entire family?" he asked, utterly confused.

"Man, you are so dumb! Let me explain. Ping One-Finger didn't have many foes to start with. And in the last several years, even these few have been wipe out by his patients. Out of all the people in the world, Ping One-Finger hated his mother-in-law the most. But because he fears his wife, he couldn't kill his mother-in-law himself or sent anyone to do it for him. Old Man here is his neighbor, and a fellow martial man in the same region. Of course I know what's on his mind, that's why I did it for him. After I killed the entire family of his in-laws, Ping One-Finger was filled with joy, that's why he worked his butt off to diagnose my daughter's illness and prescribed me the treatment," Old Man explained.

"I see," Linghu Chong nodded. "Master Old, your pills are wonderful medicine, but they don't suit my illness. How is your daughter doing right now? Is there enough time to collect the ingredients and make new pills for her?"

"My daughter will only have one year left at most. What makes you think there's still time to make new pills?" Old Man roared angrily. "Alas, having no other alternatives, I guess I'll just have to give it one last try."

He took out several ropes and firmly tied Linghu Chong's wrists and ankles to the chair. Tearing open Linghu Chong's robe, he exposed Linghu Chong's chest.

"What are you doing?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Don't worry, you'll see," Old Man answered with a leer.

Picking Linghu Chong up together with the chair, he walked through two rooms, and after lifting a heavy cotton curtain, he went into the third room.

As soon as Linghu Chong entered the room, he felt the extreme mugginess inside. The room was completely sealed; even the windows were covered with cotton sheets, making sure that no wind would sneak in from any crack of the

window. Two large basins, filled with charcoal fire, occupied the middle of the room. The bed was by one side of the room with curtains hanging low, almost touching the ground. The entire room was filled with a strong smell of herb medicine.

Old Man set the chair down in front of the bed and then lifted the curtain.

“Not-Dead, my sweet girl, how are you feeling today?” he asked gently.

Linghu Chong couldn't believe what he had just heard. “What? The name of Old Man's daughter is ‘Not-Dead’. Wouldn't that make the girl's full name Old, Not-Dead? Ah, I see. He mentioned that his daughter had this weird disease even before she was born. He probably was very afraid of losing her, hence naming her ‘Not-Dead’ as a lucky charm, because it would certainly be a very fortunate thing if one can live till he's very old. Wait, her name starts with the word ‘not’, then she must have been a member of my Master's apprentice class.”<sup>44</sup> The more he thought about this, the more amused he became.

A girl lay on the bed with her eyes shut tightly. She was probably around seventeen years of age. Her face was completely pale and her long hair scattered all over the quilt looking somewhat yellowish and unhealthy.

“Daddy!” the girl murmured without opening her eyes.

“Not-Dead, my sweetheart! The ‘Life-Extending Eight Pills’ Daddy has been preparing for you are finally ready today. After you take them, you will get better in no time, and you'll finally be able to get up and play,” Old Man said gently.

The girl answered with a hum and didn't seem to be very concerned.

Seeing the seriousness of the girl's disease, Linghu Chong felt very sorry for her.

“Old Man must have loved her daughter so very much that he couldn't bare to bring himself to speak the truth and had to lie to her to cheer her up,” he thought to himself.



Old Man put his arm under his daughter's neck. "Why don't you sit up a little? It will be easier this way when you take the medicine. The medicine didn't come easy at all. We'd better not waste any of it," he explained.

The girl slowly sat up and Old Man immediately placed two pillows behind her back to make it a little more comfortable for her. The girl opened her eyes and then caught the sight of Linghu Chong. Utterly surprised, she rolled her eyes and stared at Linghu Chong.

"Dad, who...who is he?" she asked.

"Him? He is no human. He is medicine," Old Man beamed.

"He is medicine?" the girl was baffled.

"Yes. He is medicine indeed. The effect of the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' are way too strong for you, my darling, that's why I had this man take the pills instead so I can draw blood from him as medicine for you," Old Man replied.

"Draw blood from him? Won't that inflict pain for him? That's...that's probably not a good idea." The girl murmured.

"This man is a retard. He won't feel any pain," Old Man comforted her.

The girl answered with a hum and then closed her eyes.

With a feeling of mingled shock and fury, Linghu Chong almost broke out swearing, but then on a second thought, he changed his mind.

"Although I didn't take the girl's life-saving pills intentionally, if she dies because of it, there's still fault on my part. Besides, I don't want to live on like this, anyway, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to atone for my mistake by saving her life with my blood." At that thought, he let out a mournful smile and kept his silence.

Old Man stood next to Linghu Chong, ready to seal his Mute Acupoint as soon as the first word came out of his mouth. But to his great surprise, he found a well-composed and unconcerned Linghu Chong smiling at him quietly, instead. Of course, he had no clue that Linghu Chong had

remained disheartened ever since Yue Lingshan had fallen in love with someone else. Especially when Linghu Chong heard the mysterious man chiding Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi for defaming him behind his back, and then seeing them dating secretly ashore, he had completely lost the desire to live on and couldn't have cared less about his own life.

"I am going to cut open your heart and use your warm blood to treat my daughter now. Aren't you afraid?" Old Man asked.

"Why should I be afraid?" Linghu Chong replied calmly.

Old Man cast a side glance at Linghu Chong for a moment, and sure enough, there was no trace of fear to be found anywhere on Linghu Chong's face.

"After I cut your heart open and draw your blood out, you are going to die. Now don't blame me for not telling you that beforehand!" Old Man said.

"Everyone will die sooner or later. It's really not that big of a difference whether one dies a few years earlier or a few years later. It would be great if my blood can save your daughter's life. Definitely beats me dying for nothing, and no good for anybody," Linghu Chong replied indifferently.

He could almost see in his imagination how apathetically Yue Lingshan would have reacted to the news of his death. She might even throw in a few comments on top of that like "that's got to serve him right" or "he's got what he deserves." A strong feeling of self-pity welled up in Linghu Chong's heart.

Old Man raised his thumb. "You are a real tough guy! Man, I've never seen anyone like you before," he praised. "It's too bad that my daughter will definitely die if she doesn't drink your blood, otherwise, I'd have let you go."

Making a trip to the kitchen, Old Man returned with a basin of boiling hot water. While holding a sharp knife with his right hand, he soaked a towel in the hot water using his left hand and then placed it on the pit of Linghu Chong's stomach. Suddenly, Zu Qianqiu's voice shouted from outside.

“Old Man, Old Man, open the door. I’ve got some good stuff for your daughter Not-Dead.”

Old Man frowned. With a swift swing, he sliced the hot towel in half, and then stuffed half of it into Linghu Chong’s mouth.

“What good stuff?” he murmured to himself as he set down the knife and the basin before opening the front door to let Zu Qianqiu in.

“Hey, Old Man, how are you going to thank me for this?” Zu Qianqiu spoke excitedly as soon as he entered the room. “It was in such urgency, but I couldn’t find you, so I took your ‘Life-Extending Eight Pills’ and fooled him into taking them. If you had known about it, you would have brought those catholicons of yours to him, yourself, but I bet you he wouldn’t take the pills that way.”

“What nonsense....” Old Man rebuked. But after Zu Qianqiu whispered something right next to his ear, he jumped up all of a sudden.

“Is this real? You...you...are not joking about it?” he asked loudly.

“Why would I joke about it? From what I heard, it is absolutely true. Now Old Man, we have been bosom friends for decades long. Tell me, did I do it the way you would have wanted me to or not?” Zu Qianqiu replied.

“Right, right! Damn, damn!” Old Man shouted, stamping his foot to the ground in agony.

“Wow...what’s going on? What right and what damn?” Zu Qianqiu was confused.

“You are right, and I am damned!” Old Man answered.

“Why are you damned?” Zu Qianqiu was even more confused.

Dragging Zu by the hand, Old Man led him straight into his daughter’s bedroom. As soon as he saw Linghu Chong, he dropped onto his knees and started kowtowing frantically.

“Young Master Linghu, Grandpa Linghu, I must have been so damned blind to have offended you today. Thank Heavens

that Zu Qianqiu got here just in time. If I had cut you open and killed you, I would have been damned to hell. Even if someone had roasted me to death and stewed all my fats into grease, it wouldn't have been enough punishment worth of my crime."

With the half towel still stuffed in his mouth, Linghu Chong only answered with some indistinguishable grunts. Zu Qianqiu hurriedly dug the towel out of Linghu Chong's mouth and asked.

"Young Master Linghu, how did you get here?"

"Senior Master Old, please, please get up! I am certainly not worth of such etiquette from you. You are really embarrassing me now," Linghu Chong spoke hurriedly as soon as the towel was out of his mouth.

"I had no idea about the relationship between Young Master Linghu and my savior. How dare I to offend you like this? Alas, I am such a moron. Alas, I should have gone to hell. Even if I had a hundred daughters and all of them are dying right now, I dare not to even imagine having Young Master Linghu to shed one drop of blood to save their cursed lives," Old Man mumbled on.

"Old Man, why did you tie Young Master Linghu up here?" Zu Qianqiu rolled his eyes.

"Alas, in a word, it was I who have committed all kinds of outrages and perverse acts. Can't you just shut up and spare me some embarrassment?" Old Man replied.

"And why do you have a basin of hot water and a sharp knife over here?" Zu Qianqiu asked again.

Old Man didn't answer his question; instead, he raised his hand and started slapping his own face hard. His fat face already looked like a pumpkin to start with, now after the strong slaps, it puffed up even more.

"I must have been very muddle-headed that I have no clue about what has happened recently. Will you, senior masters, please shed some lights for me?" Linghu Chong beseeched.

"Why don't we talk that over some drinks?" suggested Old Man as he and Zu Qianqiu untied the rope around Linghu Chong hastily.

Casting a side-glance toward the girl on the bed, Linghu Chong asked, "Would your daughter's illness get any worse?"

"No, it will not. Even if it does, alas, well...that's...." Old Man kept murmured to himself words that no one except himself could recognize.

After ushering Linghu Chong and Zu Qianqiu to the front hall, Old Man filled three bowls with wine and also took out a large plate of pork strips to go with the wine. Raising his wine respectfully, he proposed a toast to Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong poured the wine down his throat in continued gulps. The wine only had a light taste and was quite ordinary. But if compared to the wine he had drunk from Zu Qianqiu's wine cups, it tasted at least ten times better.

"Young Master Linghu, I am such a stupid muddle-head to have offended you. Alas, this...that...really...." Speaking with a terrified face, Old Man was out of words to express his sincere regrets.

"Young Master Linghu is a large-minded man. He won't blame you. Besides, if the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' of yours are truly effective and could mend Young Master Linghu's health, then you will be the one to thank for," Zu Qianqiu comforted him.

"Well, I don't...deserve the credit. Brother Zu, we've got to thank you," Old Man answered.

Zu Qianqiu grinned. "Since I took your eight pills, I was afraid that it might hinder niece Not-Dead's recovery. Here are some ginsengs for her to take as a tonic." He stooped down and then took out a basket. After removing the lid, he pulled out holds of ginsengs, some thick and some slender. There were perhaps at least ten pounds of them.

"Where did you get so much ginsengs?" Old Man asked.

"Where else? From the medicine shop, of course. I borrowed some," Zu Qianqiu answered with a mischievous

grin.

“Like when Liu Bei borrowed the city of Jinzhou,<sup>45</sup> there’s no returning,” Old Man burst into loud laughter. Even though he forced a smile, he still couldn’t completely hide the grief and worries written on his face.

“Mister Old and Mister Zu,” Linghu Chong said, “although you had good intentions trying to mend my injures, one of you tricked me and the other one tied me up. Now isn’t that a bit disrespectful for me?”

Hearing that, both Old Man and Zu Qianqiu stood up immediately and bowed to Linghu Chong with their hands folded in front. “Young Master Linghu, we are so sorry. You can punish us anyway you see fit; we certainly deserve it,” they answered in unison.

“Fine! I have a question. You must give me a straight answer. Will you please tell me who is behind all these that have made you show such great respect to me?” Linghu Chong asked.

Old Man and Zu Qianqiu exchanged a stare at each other.

“Well...that...that’s your question?” Old Man murmured.

“Young Master Linghu, of course you know this person. Please forgive us for daring not to mention this person’s name,” Zu Qianqiu answered after a pause.

“But I swear that I don’t know who he is,” Linghu Chong assured them. He couldn’t help but ponder. “Is it Grand Uncle-Master Feng? Or is it Great Master No Commandment? Or even Tian Boguang? How about Elder Bamboo-Green? It doesn’t seem to be any of them. Grand Uncle-Master Feng certainly has such respectful reputation and prestige, but he is living a secluded life and didn’t even allow me to let out his whereabouts? How could he have left Mount Huashan for this?”

“Young Master, what you are asking here, brother Old and I most definitely dare not to answer. Even if you kill us, we wouldn’t dare answer just the same. You already know the

answer in your heart, why do you have to force us to spill it out?" Zu Qianqiu replied.

Hearing the firm tone in his voice, Linghu Chong knew that it would be of no use to try to force the answer out from him. So he said, "Fine. Your not answering my question is certainly not helping with venting my fury. Mister Old, you tied me up to a chair and scared the wits out of me. It's my turn to tie the two of you up this time. And maybe I still wouldn't be relieved and would want to cut out your hearts."

Old Man and Zu Qianqiu exchanged another stare and then answered in unison, "If you want to tie us up, we dare not resist in any way."

Old Man took out two chairs and a bunch of thick ropes. The two of them first tied their own feet to the legs of the chairs tightly and then placed their hands behind their back. "Young Master Linghu, if you will," they said, both thinking that Linghu Chong wasn't really going to tie them up to vent his anger and most likely he was just joking. But to their great surprise, Linghu Chong actually picked up the rope and tied their hands behind their backs as tightly as he could before picking up Old Man's knife.

"I can't seal your acupoints with my finger because I lost all my inner energy. But I am afraid that you would try to get out of the ropes. That's why I am gonna strike your acupoints with the knife handle to seal them that way," Linghu Chong explained.

He turned the knife over and then struck the two with much strength at the Huan-Tiao, Tian-Zhu, and Shao-Hai Acupoints using the knife handle. It took him a while to finally seal the acupoints. Stunned, Old Man and Zu Qianqiu looked at each other in speechless despair, and soon felt tickles of fear growing into swarms of terror, not knowing what Linghu Chong had planned next.

"You wait here for me," Linghu Chong exclaimed as he turned and walked out of the hall.

Holding the knife in his grip, Linghu Chong walked until he was outside of the girl's bedroom. He cleared his throat and then asked.

"Miss Old...um...miss, how are you feeling?"

He had wanted to address her as "Miss Old," but then he decided against that. Even though the girl's family name was Old, in her young age, it wouldn't sound very appropriate to call her "Miss Old," and "Miss Old Not-Dead" would simply be unimaginably queer. The girl didn't answer, and only let out a slight snort.

Linghu Chong lifted the cotton curtain and then entered the room. He could see her still in a sitting position, leaning against the pillows, her eyes slightly open, half awake and half asleep. Linghu Chong took two steps forward. Now he could see that her skin on her face almost looked like crystal. Blue veins could clearly be seen underneath the light yellowish muscles; it almost appeared as if he could see blood flowing slowly along the veins. It was so quiet in the room. Everything was in a standing still, not even a trace of brisk wind, as if the blood inside her was also coagulating drop by drop, except her tender breathing, so weak that it seemed as if every time when she breathe out, that was one less breathe for her.

"This young girl could have survived if I didn't take her medicine pills by mistake. I don't have many days left anyway. It doesn't make much difference whether I live a few days more or a few days less, does it?" Linghu Chong thought.

He reached out and grabbed a china bowl. Placing it on the small bed table, he raised his left wrist and then sliced it open with the knife. Blood immediately gushed out like a spring and poured down into the china bowl. Noticing that the basin of hot water Old Man had prepared earlier was still letting out hot steams, he set the knife down and then splashed some hot water over the cut on the wrist so the



blood wouldn't start clotting too soon. Within moments, blood had filled more than half of the bowl.

Even in the wooziness, the girl soon noticed the strong smell of blood and as soon as she opened her eyes, the sight of blood dripping all over from Linghu Chong's wrist terrified her. She let out a shriek in shock.

Seeing that the bowl was almost filled with blood, Linghu Chong walked next to the bed and then held the bowl right next to the girl's mouth.

"Hurry, drink this. There are panaceas in the blood that will be able to cure your decease," he urged gently.

"I...I...I am scared. I don't...want to drink that," the girl rejected.

After shedding a bowl worth of blood, Linghu Chong felt as if his head had become completely drained and his legs almost gave out under him.

"If she doesn't drink this because she is scared, wouldn't I have shed my blood for nothing?" he thought to himself.

Grabbing the knife into his left hand, he yelled, "If you don't do what I tell you, I'll kill you with this knife." Right after the last word, he placed the tip of the blade next to the girl's throat.

The girl feared for her life and had to swallow down the entire bowl of blood. For several times she almost vomited from the nauseating, but every time when she caught the sight of the shining blade in Linghu Chong's hand, the terror overwhelmed her and prevented her from throwing up.

Linghu Chong watched her drink up the entire bowl of blood. The wound on his wrist had slowly stopped bleeding as blood clots started forming around it.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "I took Old Man's 'Life-Extending Eight Pills,' but what went into the girl's stomach was perhaps even less than one tenth of it. Once I use the restroom a few times, I am afraid even more would be lost. I'd better feed her a few more bowls of blood while I still can, until I am too weak to move about." At that thought, he cut

open his right wrist, also, and as soon as the bowl was filled with blood, he rushed to feed the girl again.

The girl frowned. "Don't...don't force me. I can't take anymore of this," she pleaded.

"It's not up to you. Hurry up! Drink! Hurry!" Linghu Chong urged.

The girl drank some more reluctantly and had to stop for a moment to catch her breath.

"Why...why are you doing this? Doing this is very harmful for your body," she said.

"It's quite alright. Don't worry about my body. It's all for your good." Linghu Chong let out a forced smile.

As soon as Branch Fairy and Fruit Fairy fell into the fishing net booby trap set by Old Man, they immediately tried to set themselves free, but the more they struggled, the tighter the fishing net became, and soon they couldn't even move their arms or legs any inch. Although the two of them couldn't move, that did not prevent their ears from functioning perfectly well and their tongues from arguing back and forth. At the time when Linghu Chong had tied Old and Zu to their chairs, Branch Fairy had predicted that he would certainly kill the two while Fruit Fairy had predicted that he would definitely come out and set the two Fairy brothers free first. But that debate ended up a total waste of time. Neither of them had gotten it right. Linghu Chong had entered the girl's bedroom instead. Since the girl's bedroom was sealed very well with all the cotton sheets, only segments of Linghu Chong and the girl's conversation could be vaguely heard. For Branch Fairy, Fruit Fairy, Yue Buqun, Old Man, and Zu Qianqiu, even though all five of them had resourceful inner energy, they still couldn't tell what Linghu Chong was doing in the girl's bedroom, so they had to let their imagination run wild. When suddenly the girl's scream broke out, all their faces changed color.

"Linghu Chong is a guy. What is he doing in a girl's bedroom?" Branch Fairy asked.

"Listen, that girl was in terror," Fruit Fairy exclaimed. "She said, 'I...I am scared!' And Linghu Chong said, 'If you don't do what I tell you, I'll kill you with this knife.' He said 'do what I tell you.' What does he want the girl to do?"

"What else? Of course he is forcing the girl to be his woman." Branch Fairy concluded.

"Ha-ha, how funny! That short melon-size man's daughter of course has to be a short melon-size girl as well. Why would Linghu Chong want to force her to be his woman?" Fruit Fairy disagreed.

"Different people favor different things! Maybe Linghu Chong has this thingy for fat girls, and as soon as he spots a fat girl, he'd find himself in heaven and totally forget about everything else." Branch Fairy argued.

"Wow, did you hear that? The fat girl is begging him now. I think she said something like, 'Don't force me. I can't take it anymore.'" Fruit Fairy imitated.

"That's right. But the chap Linghu Chong is determined. He said, 'It's not up to you. Hurry up! Hurry!'" Branch Fairy followed.

"Why is Linghu Chong asking her to hurry up? Hurry up doing what?" Fruit Fairy asked.

"You never got married and are still a virgin, of course you don't understand," Branch Fairy mocked.

"Like you've ever married anyone, you shameless jerk!" Fruit Fairy fought back.

"You know that I never got married. Why did you ask me for?" Branch Fairy reproved.

"Hey, Old Man! Linghu Chong is forcing your daughter to be his woman. Are you just going to sit there and watch her die?" Fruit Fairy shouted out loud.

"Mind your own business," Branch Fairy admonished. "How do you know that fat girl is going to die? Isn't his daughter's name 'Old Not-Dead'? How can she die?"

Ever since Old Man and Zu Qianqiu were tied to their chairs and their acupoints sealed, they listened through

everything, from Miss Old's scream to the sound of her begging for mercy. Gazing at each other with blank dismay, they were totally out of ideas. They had suspected the same thing themselves, and the loud arguments from the Peach Valley's two Fairies in the courtyard only confirmed their suspicion.

"Brother Old, we've got to stop this. Who would have expected Young Master Linghu to be such a lubricious man? I am afraid he is going to get into big trouble," Zu Qianqiu said to Old Man.

"Alas, I wouldn't have minded him deflowering Not-Dead the kid, but...but that would really be unfair for the other one." Old Man heaved a sigh.

"Listen, listen to that," Zu Qianqiu suggested. "Your daughter Not-Dead has grown quite some affection for him. She said, 'Doing this is very harmful for your body.' And did you hear how Linghu Chong responded?"

"He said, 'It's quite alright. Don't worry about my body. It's all for your good!' God damn it! These two kids!" Old Man replied.

"Brother Old, congratulations, congratulations!" Zu Qianqiu burst into loud laughter.

"Congratulations my ass!" Old Man scolded angrily.

"What are you getting angry for? Congratulations for getting a wonderful son-in-law!" Zu Qianqiu grinned.

Old Man let out a loud shout and reproved with a yell, "Stop the nonsense! If this gets out, do you think we'd still be alive?" When he spoke these words, his voice was filled with utter fear.

"Right, right!" Zu Qianqiu replied. His voice also quavered.

Yue Buqun had been hiding on the tree outside of the wall and was even further from it. Although he initialized the "Divine Art of the Violet Twilight," he was only able to hear fragments of the conversation. At first, when he heard Linghu Chong forcing the girl, he had wanted to rush inside to stop

it, but then he changed his mind, thinking that all these people, Linghu Chong included, had been so secretive and unusual, who was it to say that they weren't conspiring something. The best thing for him to do at the time would be to observe calmly and not act recklessly. So he simply listened on with his 'Divine Art of the Violet Twilight' fully loaded. Then the dialogues between the Peach Valley's Two Fairies and the ones between Old and Zu kept ringing in his ears. He was also convinced that Linghu Chong must have taken advantage of the girl's precarious condition and had molested the girl. Later when he heard the conversation between Old and Zu, he figured that since Linghu Chong was a dissolute and unconventional young man and the girl probably did carry her father's genes and was a short and fat, ugly girl, it would only be natural for her to fall in love with Linghu Chong after losing her virginity to him. Seeing how ludicrous the episode has become, he couldn't help but shake his head in despair.

The girl's screaming voice rose again all of a sudden. "Don't...don't...too much blood. I beg of you...."

Suddenly, someone shouted from outside the walls, "Old Man, I've finally lost those Peach Valley's Four Goblins." Then came a gentle thud as the man leapt over the wall and entered the hall. It was none other than the man with the white banner who had provoked the Peach Valley's Four Fairies into chasing him.

"What's going on?" He was shocked to find Old Man and Zu Qianqiu both tied up to their chairs. He flipped his right hand swiftly and a shining dagger magically appeared in his palm. Waving his arms hurriedly a few times, he had cut lose the ropes around the two's legs and arms.

The girl's scream rose from her room once again, "Please...please...I beg you...no more."

Picking up the urgency in her tone of voice, the man uttered a cry of shock, "It is Miss Old Not-Dead!" He dashed toward the door.

Grabbing the man by his arm quickly, Old Man yelled, "You can't go in there!"

Stunned, the man put a halt to his steps. Then came the voice of Branch Fairy from the courtyard.

"I bet you the short melon must be thrilled to have a son-in-law like Linghu Chong."

"Linghu Chong could die any day now. Why would he be so thrilled to have a half-dead half-alive son-in-law?" Fruit Fairy challenged.

"His daughter could die any day as well. They make a perfect half-dead half-alive couple," Branch Fairy explained.

"Now, who will die and who will live?" Fruit Fairy asked.

"What a dumb question! Of course Linghu Chong will die. Miss Old Not-Dead's name is Old Not-Dead. How can she ever die? Dummy!" Branch Fairy mocked.

"That's not necessarily true. Does one's name always reflect the reality? What if everybody in this world were named Old Not-Dead? Would every one of them grow old yet do not die? If that's the case, then our training in martial arts would have been no good at all," Fruit Fairy rebuffed.

Amid the arguing between the two brothers, a loud thud came from inside the room. Something had collapsed onto the floor. Miss Old screamed again, though her voice was weak, it was filled with panic.

"Dad, Dad! Come here, hurry!"

Old Man sprinted into the bedroom, only finding Linghu Chong lying on the floor unconscious, a china bowl leaning by his chest upside down and blood all over his upper body. Miss Old leaned by the bed. There was also blood by the corner of her mouth. Zu Qianqiu and the other man stood behind Old Man and stared at the bizarre scene, each with a stomach full of questions.

"Dad, he...he cut himself to draw blood, and then forced me to drink two bowls worth...he...he wants to cut himself more...." Miss Old exclaimed.

The shock struck Old Man like a thunder. He rushed forward and propped Linghu Chong's upper body into his own arms. Now he could see the cuts on both of Linghu Chong's wrists from which blood was still gushing out nonstop. Scared out of his wits, Old Man sprinted out of the room and returned with gauzes, bandages, and medication within moments. In the fluster, even though this was his own home, he still bumped his head on the doorframes, resulting in a big swelling on his forehead and a large hole on the wall.

When Branch Fairy heard the banging sound, he thought Old Man must have given Linghu Chong a good beating, so he shouted.

"Hey, Old Man, Linghu Chong is a good friend of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. Stop beating him. If you beat him to death, I promise you that the Peach Valley's Six Fairies will tear all your fats into strips."

"Wrong! Wrong!" Fruit Fairy reproved.

"What's wrong?" Branch Fairy inquired.

"If he had muscles all around his body, then of course you can tear them into strips. But all he has are fats. You'll end up with a bunch of grease. How can you tear fats into strips?" Fruit Fairy argued.

Old Man applied the medication to the wrist wounds and then wrapped the wounds well with bandages. After a good while of massaging the acupoints on Linghu Chong's chest and stomach, Linghu Chong finally regained his consciousness.

Feeling slightly relieved and utterly grateful, Old Man muttered in a shaky voice, "Young Master Linghu, you...even by smashing us into bits and pieces wouldn't have...alas... wouldn't have...."

"Young Master Linghu, it was only because of a misunderstanding that Old Man tied you up earlier. Why did you take it so seriously? You are just making him feel even more embarrassed," Zu Qianqiu said.

Linghu Chong let out a weak smile. "My internal injury cannot be cured by any catholicon. I truly appreciate the kindness of senior master Zu for feeding me the 'Life-Extending Eight Pills' that belonged to senior master Old. But it was really a waste...I hope this girl's disease can be cured...." A strong feel of disorientation, caused by losing much blood, suddenly consumed him, and he passed out, once again.

Carrying Linghu Chong in his arms, Old Man walked out of his daughter's bedroom and set Linghu Chong down on his own bed. "What now? What now?" he muttered distractedly with a long, worried face.

"Young Master Linghu lost a lot of blood. I am afraid he is on the edge of his life. What do you think if we three load all our inner energy and inject the inner energy into his body to revive him? What do you say?" Zu Qianqiu suggested.

"Naturally," Old Man concurred.

He gently propped Linghu Chong up and placed his right palm on the Da-Zhui Acupoint at Linghu Chong's back. As soon as he initialized his energy flow, his entire body suddenly shocked violently. A loud crack echoed as the chair he sat on collapsed to the floor and was smashed into bits and pieces.

Branch Fairy burst into loud laughter. "Guess how Linghu Chong inflicted his internal injury at the first place? It was all because our six brothers tried to heal him with our internal energy. Now the short melon decides to play the ape. Aren't you just going to cause Linghu Chong new injuries on top of what he already has? Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

"Hey, did you hear that loud cracking sound? That short melon must have been shocked by the inner energy inside Linghu Chong and smashed into something. Linghu Chong's inner energy is actually our inner energy. The short melon, once again, is suffering from the wrath of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies! Wonderful! Wonderful!" Fruit Fairy added.



“Alas, if Young Master Linghu stays unconscious like this, I guess there’s only one thing left for the Old Man. I’ll just have to kill myself,” Old Man heaved a heavy sigh.

The man came in last suddenly yelled out loudly, “Hi, the one on the jujube tree outside, are you Mr. Yue, the Head Master of the Huashan School?”

Yue Buqun was dumbfounded. “So he knew I was hiding here all along,” he thought inwardly.

“Mr. Yue, you are a guest from afar. Why don’t you come in for a visit?” the man shouted again.

Yue Buqun felt very awkward. It wouldn’t be a good idea to go in, yet by now he could no longer stay on top of the jujube tree.

“Young Master Linghu, your apprentice, has fainted. Would you like to take a look at him?” the man urged again.

Clearing his throat to cover up the embarrassment, Yue Buqun leapt over the one dozen feet or so space in the courtyard and landed directly on the corridor under the eaves. By then Old Man had greeted out and cupped his hands to salute.

“Mr. Yue, come in please,” he said.

“Forgive me for being an unexpected guest. I was just concerned about the safety of my apprentice,” Yue Buqun replied.

“It was all my fault. Alas, if...if...” Old Man muttered.

“Don’t you worry about it! Linghu Chong won’t die,” Branch Fairy suddenly cut in.

“How do you know that he won’t die?” Old Man was overjoyed and asked hurriedly.

“He is much younger than you and also much younger than me, isn’t he?” Branch Fairy asked.

“Yeah, what about it?” Old Man was confused.

“Now do older people die first or do younger people die first? Of course it’s older people who will die first, duh! Since you are not dead and I am perfectly alive, how can Linghu Chong die?” Branch Fairy explained.

Old Man had hoped that he would probably have some unique ideas. Hearing the drivel from him, he could only let out a wry smile.

"I've got a real clever idea!" Fruit Fairy joined in. "Let's all put our efforts together and change Linghu Chong's name to 'Linghu Not-Dead'...."

Yue Buqun followed Old Man and entered his bedroom, and then saw Linghu Chong lying on the bed, still unconscious.

"If I don't make an exhibition of my 'Divine Art of the Violet Twilight,' these folks here would undoubtedly make light of our Huashan School," he thought to himself.

He turned toward the bed, so when the violet color showed on his face no one would notice it, and secretly initialized his divine art. As soon as the divine art is loaded, he placed his palm on the Da-Zhui Acupoint on Linghu Chong's back. Knowing how the energy streams swarmed inside Linghu Chong, he didn't put much strength into his move, instead, only injected very little inner energy slowly. And as soon as he could feel the inner energy inside Linghu Chong started reacting to his maneuver, he pulled his palm back about half-an-inch from Linghu Chong's skin and waited a short moment before placing his palm back onto Linghu Chong again.

A short while went by when Linghu Chong gradually gained his senses back and was able to speak, "Master, you... you are here."

Seeing how Yue Buqun revived Linghu Chong without putting out much effort, the three observers made no effort to hide their admiration.

"This place is a hotbed of trouble," thought Yue Buqun to himself, "better get out of here soon. Besides, I wonder what's happening with my wife and the bunch of apprentices on the boat?" So he cupped his hand and said, "Thank you very much for your cordial reception to my apprentice and I. We'd better get going."

“Right, right! Young Master Linghu is not feeling well; we really should have been a better host. But he would probably be taken better care of with you. It is really a lack of manner on our side. We beg your pardon,” Old Man apologized.

“You are being too modest,” Yue Buqun replied.

Under the dim light in the room, he suddenly noticed the shining eyes of the third man, and a quick thought flashed by his mind.

“May I ask the respectful name of this friend?” cupping his hand in greet, he asked.

“I guess Mr. Yue has never met our ‘Night Owl’ Ji Wushi before,” Zu Qianqiu grinned.

Yue Buqun felt a small chill in his heart as he pondered, “Night Owl Ji Wushi? I heard that this man was born with special abilities and has extraordinary eyesight. His conducts has always been uncertain, sometimes kind while sometimes wicked, sometimes good, yet at other times evil. Although his name is Ji Wushi, meaning out of one’s wits, he is really a very tough one full of craft and cunning. Who would have expected him to be mingled up with the bunch such as Old Man?”

Cupping his hands hurriedly, he greeted, “I’ve heard your name many times and have long been looking forward to meet you. It’s so fortunate that I finally got the chance today.”

“Well, not just today. Aren’t we going to meet again tomorrow on the Five-Tyrant Ridge?” Ji Wushi grinned.

Yue Buqun felt another chill in his heart. Even though he felt it wasn’t the right manner to ask for more details after they had only met for a few minutes, his worries regarding his kidnapped daughter overwhelmed his concern for proper protocols.

“I was wondering how I have offended fellow martial friends in the local area, somehow. I figured that it must have been my lack of manners for having not paid any visits to the various masters around here. Would Mr. Ji be kind enough to

give me some pointers, as to which friends had invited my daughter and an apprentice named Lin over?"

"Really? I don't think I know much about that," Ji Wushi replied with another grin.

To ask Ji Wushi so nicely about the whereabouts of his daughter was already quite a concession for Yue Buqun – the Head Master of the renowned Huashan School. When Ji Wushi obviously had evaded the issue, though worried and irritated, Yue Buqun could not ask any further. So he put on an indifferent face and said dryly,

"I am sorry to have disturbed you so late at night. I'll see you around."

He propped Linghu Chong up and was just about to pick him up into his arms, when Old Man suddenly stuck his head out between the Master and the apprentice and rushed to hold Linghu Chong into his own arms.

"I am the one who took Young Master Linghu here, so naturally I am the one responsible for sending him back," he exclaimed as he grabbed a thin blanket to cover up Linghu Chong's body before striding out.

"Hey, hold it! What about us, the two big fish here?" Branch Fairy shouted in a hurry.

"Well..." Old Man hesitated. If he let the two brothers go, it would really be difficult to ward off the revenge from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies. But with these two as hostages, the other four would at least have some scruples.

Linghu Chong knew what Old Man had in his mind. "Senior master Old, will you please set the two of them free? Now you two Fairies, will you please not seek any revenge or cause any trouble for Master Old and Master Zu? How about turning adversity into friendship?" he suggested.

"With just the two of us, I don't think we can make trouble for them even if we tried," Branch Fairy replied.

"Of course I am referring to all six of the Peach Valley's Fairies," Linghu Chong clarified.

“To not seek revenge or make trouble for them is alright, but there’s no way we are going to turn adversity into friendship. Even if you chop my head off, there’s still no way,” Fruit Fairy exclaimed.

Old Man and Zu Qianqiu both grunted, thinking, “It is only for the sake of Young Master Linghu that we have agreed to not fuss about with you. Did you actually think the ‘Old Ancestor of the Yellow River’ is afraid of the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies?”

“Why’s that?” Linghu Chong asked.

“The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies never had any grudges against or any scores to settle with the Old Ancestor of the Yellow River. We are never adversaries, so there’s simply no way that we can turn ‘adversity’ to anything. That’s why becoming friends would be fine but there’s no way we can turn ‘adversity’ to ‘friendship’ no matter what,” Fruit Fairy elaborated.

At those words, everyone laughed out loud. Zu Qianqiu stooped down and untied the slipknot on the fishing net. The strings of the fishing net were made from human hair, silk from wild silkworms, and pure gold threads interweaved together, which then became extremely tenacious and persistent. Even sharp knives or swords couldn’t have been able to cut through them. If anyone got trapped inside it, the more he struggled, the tighter it became. Unless someone untied the slipknot from the outside, it would be impossible to get out of the trap.

As soon as Branch Fairy got back onto his feet, he dropped his pants and started pissing all over the fishing net.

“What...what are you doing?” Zu Qianqiu asked in shock.

“If I don’t piss all over this damn net, how am I going to vent my spleen?” Branch Fairy answered.

The seven of them returned to the wharf. Yue Buqun could see from a distance that the two apprentices Lao Denuo and Gao Gemming had been guarding the boat with

swords in their hands. Knowing that everyone was alright, he was slightly relieved.

Old Man carried Linghu Chong into the cabin and then bowed all the way down.

“Young Master Linghu, your virtue shines above the nine Heavens, I am utterly grateful for what you have done. I’ll say goodbye for now but we’ll meet again soon.”

Because of the bumps on the way back, Linghu Chong had fallen back into a state of wooziness and almost fainted again. He didn’t really catch Old Man’s words and only answered with a weak hum.

Noticing the completely opposite attitude shown by the meatball man before and after, how respectful and cautious he had become toward Linghu Chong, Madam Yue and the rest of the apprentices were dumbfounded. Afraid that Root Fairy and the bunch of Peach Valley Fairies might get back soon, Old Man and Zu Qianqiu didn’t want to stay any longer and soon bid their farewell to Yue Buqun.

“Wait, brother Zu.” Branch Fairy beckoned at Zu Qianqiu.

“What’s the matter?” Zu Qianqiu asked.

“This!” Branch Fairy answered as he bent his knees and suddenly rammed his shoulder toward Zu Qianqiu’s chest with full speed.

This completely caught Zu Qianqiu by surprise. Having no time to dodge away, Zu Qianqiu quickly loaded his inner energy. Within a split second, he had gathered resourceful inner energy in his lower stomach, which made his chest and stomach as hard as a rock. Dozens of cracking and smashing noises exploded all at once. A split second later, Branch Fairy had quickly withdrawn back dozens of feet, bursting into loud laughter.

“Oh no!” Zu Qianqiu uttered a cry as he reached into his chest pocket and took out countless of bits and pieces. Among those were chips of china, jade, bamboo, and wood. The over two dozens of precious wine cups in Zu Qianqiu’s chest pocket had all been smashed from the collision, even

cups like the Golden Cup, Silver Cup, or the Bronze Jue had all been completely flattened out. Consumed by strong fury and deep regrets, Zu Qianqiu waved his hand and shot the scores of debris toward Branch Fairy like a swarm of darts, but Branch Fairy had expected that and swiftly dodged away.

“Linghu Chong told us to turn adversity into friendship. We must obey his orders. That’s why we must become adversaries first before becoming friends,” Branch Fairy shouted.

Having lost all the precious wine cups that took him decades to collect by Branch Fairy’s one single hit, Zu Qianqiu was infuriated. But hearing Branch Fairy’s words just when he was about to launch his full wave of attacks, he immediately pulled his steps back.

“That’s right. Turn adversaries into friends. Turn adversaries into friends,” he murmured with a wry smile and then walked away together with Old Man and Ji Wushi.

In his muddled mind state, Linghu Chong was still concerned about the safety of Yue Lingshan. “Branch Fairy, will you please ask them to not...not harm my apprentice sister Yue?” he said.

“Certainly!” Branch Fairy answered and then shouted out loudly, “Hey! Old Man, Night Owl, and Zu Qianqiu, listen up! Linghu Chong said that you should not harm his darling apprentice sister.”

Ji Wushi and the group of three had walked quite a distance away when they heard Branch Fairy. At the words they all stopped their steps. Old Man turned his head around and shouted his answer.

“If Young Master Linghu says so, we’ll certainly comply.”

After the three of them discussed this over some whispers, they resumed their steps.

Yue Buqun started telling Madam Yue what he saw and heard over at Old Man’s house, but only a few sentences into it, loud shouts and noises from ashore interrupted him. Root Fairy and the rest of the three Fairies had returned.

The four of them certainly kept their mouths busy bragging continuously about how they had caught the man holding the white banner and how they had torn him into four pieces.

Fruit Fairy laughed so hard that he almost lost a few teeth. “Wow! Amazing!! Brothers, you guys are so awesome!” he mocked.

“Ha-ha, so you tore that man into four pieces. Did you know what his name was?” Branch Fairy asked.

“He’s dead already. Who cares what his name was? Could you have known his name?” Trunk Fairy answered.

“Of course I do,” Branch Fairy replied. “His name is Ji Wushi, and he also has a nick name called ‘Night Owl’.”

Leaf Fairy applauded. “Hey! What a wonderful name that was! Turned out this guy actually had some insights. He must have known beforehand that one day he would be caught by the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies and would be totally out of his wits,<sup>46</sup> having no way of escaping the fate of being torn into four pieces, that’s why he gave himself that name.”

“That ‘Night Owl’ Ji Wushi was certainly a tough guy. His Kung Fu was so extraordinary! And totally exceptional too!” Fruit Fairy exclaimed.

“That’s right, his Kung Fu was excellent,” Root Fairy couldn’t have agreed more. “If it weren’t for his bad luck that he picked the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies to mess with, his Kung Fu in Qing-Gong could have ranked him among the top fighters in the Martial World.”

“His Kung Fu in Qing-Gong was nothing compared to this. Did you know that after you tore him into four pieces, he was able to put all the pieces back together and revive himself from death, and then walked around just like normal? He even came here just moments ago and had a nice chat with us.” Fruit Fairy cracked an evil grin.

By then did Root Fairy and the rest of the three Fairies finally realize that their lie had been uncovered, but neither



of them had much concern about it, and all put on a pretended surprise on their faces.

“Wow, I had no idea that Ji Wushi knew such odd Kung Fu. That just proves the old saying that you cannot judge a person by his look like you cannot measure the ocean using a ladler. How admirable! Truly remarkable!” Flower Fairy exclaimed.

“I’ve heard that there’s this Kung Fu called the ‘Piece Parts Back into a Whole Art’, which allows the practitioner to put the torn apart four pieces of himself back into a whole and allows him to walk normally within instants. But I thought this Kung Fu had been lost ages ago. Who would have expected that Ji Wushi somehow have mastered it? Hmm, he is indeed a unique one in the Martial World. Well, I suppose the next time when we see him, it’s all right to befriend him,” Trunk Fairy speculated.

Meanwhile, Yue Buqun and Madam Yue found themselves profoundly worried. Their beloved daughter had been kidnapped, yet they had not a clue in regard to whom the enemy might have been. The Huashan Sword School enjoyed great fame in the entire Martial World; they certainly didn’t expect to suffer such a setback by the Yellow River. But they kept the feeling to themselves and showed no sign of it, afraid that it would create a panic among the many apprentices. The couple didn’t discuss any of the doubts and suspicious they had accrued, either, only pondered upon them individually, and the only noises inside the cabin were nothing but the constant rubbish coming out of the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies.

Over two hours went by uneventfully, and daybreak was almost around the corner. Suddenly the sound of footsteps from ashore broke the silence and moments later two sedans had arrived by the bank.

The leading sedan carrier announced in a loud and clear tone, “Young Master Linghu said that Miss Yue should not be harmed or frightened in any way. Our superior has sent us to

apologize for the accident and ask for Young Master Linghu's forgiveness."

The four carriers set down the two sedans, bowed toward the direction of the boat, and then turned around and walked away.

"Dad! Mom!" Yue Lingshan's voice shouted from inside one of the sedans.

Shocked but utterly overjoyed, the Yue couple leapt ashore and lifted the curtain of the sedan. Needless to say, it was Yue Lingshan sitting inside, only that the acupoints on her legs had been sealed, which prevented her from moving about. And not to their surprise, the occupant of the second sedan was none other than Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Buqun stroked the Huan-Tiao, Ji-Zhong, and Wei-Zhong Acupoints on his daughter's legs and opened the sealed acupoints for her.

"Who was that large-build man?" he asked.

"That tall and big giant, he...he...he...." Curling her cute lips, Yue Lingshan almost cried out.

Gently picking her up and holding her in her arms, Madam Yue walked back into the cabin. "Are you alright?" she asked in a whisper?

Hearing her mother's question, Yue Lingshan burst into a sob, which almost gave Madam Yue a heart attack.

"Those people weren't really law abiding citizens of the society. Lingshan was in their hands for quite some hours. Could she...could she have been disgraced?" Madam Yue's imagination started running wild. "What happened? It's alright, you can tell your mother," she asked hurriedly. But Yue Lingshan only cried louder.

Madam Yue started to panic, but she couldn't ask anything further with such a big crowd around. Setting her daughter down to a bed, she pulled a quilt and wrapped it around her.

"Mom, that big giant swore at me," Yue Lingshan suddenly cried out after some loud sniffs, and her words set

Madam Yue's heart back into its chamber.

"Is that all? Are you just grieving over some badmouthing?" Madam Yue asked with a smile.

"He also raised his hand to scare me, pretending that he was going to hit me," Yue Lingshan exclaimed as she cried on.

"Alright, alright! When we see him next time, we'll cuss him back and scare him back," Madam Yue comforted her with a grin.

"I never badmouthed big apprentice brother, neither did Little Lin. That big giant was so vicious and overbearing. He said that what he doesn't like the most was for people to badmouth Linghu Chong. I said I don't like that either. Then he said that if he doesn't like someone, he'd simply cook him and eat him. Mom, at that word, he opened his mouth to scare me with his ghastly teeth," Yue Lingshan whimpered.

"That was evil," Madam Yue replied. "Chong, who is that giant man?"

"The giant man? I...I...." Still quite muddleheaded, Linghu Chong murmured back.

By then, Lin Pingzhi's sealed acupoints were also opened by his Master and he had walked in the cabin.

"Master-Wife, that giant man and the monk really do eat human flesh. They weren't just trying to sound scary," he intercepted.

"The two of them do eat human flesh? How did you know?" Madam Yue was stunned.

"The monk asked me about the Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript for a while and then took out something from his chest pocket and started chewing on it with full interest. He even stuck that thing under my nose and asked me if I wanted to take a bite just for the taste of it. Turned out... turned out that thing was the hand of a human."

"Why didn't you mention any of that to me earlier?" Yue Lingshan uttered a cry of shock.

"I was afraid you would be frightened, so I kept that to myself," Lin Pingzhi answered.

"Ah, I remember now," Yue Buqun suddenly spoke out. "Those two are the 'Bear Duo of the Northern Desert.' The giant man's skin is almost completely white while the monk's skin is very dark, isn't it?"

"That's right! Dad, you know them?" Yue Lingshan asked.

"No, I don't. I just heard before that there are two notorious robbers in the northern desert region. One is called the White Bear, and the other one the Black Bear. If merchants travel by themselves, these 'Bear Duo' merely rob them of their goods, but if the goods were transferred by martial escorts, then the 'Bear Duo' often cooks the escorts up and eats them. They say that since martial people have stronger muscles, they are normally extra chewy," Yue Buqun elaborated.

"Ah!" Yue Lingshan let out another cry of terror.

"Senior apprentice brother! Why did you have to bring that up? 'Extra chewy,' that's so gross," Madam Yue protested.

Yue Buqun let out a slight grin. After a short pause, he continued, "I heard that the 'Bear Duo of the Northern Desert' never came to this side of the Great Wall. Why did they come by the Yellow River this time? Chong, how did you know the 'Bear Duo of the Northern Desert'?"

"Bare Dew of the Northern Desert?" Linghu Chong murmured. He didn't really pick up the first half of his Master's words, and thought his Master had said "Bare Dew" or something like that. "I don't know him," he answered after a short daze.

"Little Lin," Yue Lingshan suddenly intercepted, "when that monk asked you to take a bite at the hand, did you do it?"

"Of course not," Lin Pingzhi answered immediately.

"You'd better not. If you did, humph, I'll never talk to you again," Yue Lingshan exclaimed.

Trunk Fairy suddenly interrupted from the outer cabin, "Human flesh is the most ambrosial relish in the entire world. I bet you that Little Lin must have sneaked a bite and just wouldn't admit it, that's all."

"If he really didn't sneak a bite, why didn't he say it at the very beginning? Why bend over backward and deny so frantically now?" Leaf Fairy added.

Ever since Lin Pingzhi's terrible family tragedy, he had always been watching out for his own words and behavior. The two Fairies' censure took him by surprise and he found himself speechless.

"There you go. See, his not answering clearly shows his acquiescence. Miss Yue, he ate human flesh and still wouldn't admit it. How can you marry someone so dishonest?" Flower Fairy joined in.

"After you marry him, undoubtedly he would court other women behind your back. And when you ask him about it when he gets home, I bet you he would deny everything all the same," Root Fairy predicted.

"And there's one more thing, a very dangerous thing I must add. Once he gets totally addicted to human flesh, when he sleeps with you on the same bed, in the middle of the night, suddenly you wake up from the terrible pain coming from your fingers, while your ears are filled with the constant cracking sound from somebody chewing on something. Then after you investigate further, guess what it is? It was Little Lin chewing on your fingers," Flower Fairy added.

"Miss Yue, even when we include your toes, you've only gotten twenty digits all together. Now when your Little Lin chews a few today and a few tomorrow, your ten fingers and ten toes won't last very long at all," Leaf Fairy said.

The Peach Valley's Six Fairies had considered Linghu Chong a good friend ever since they first met him on top of the Mount Huashan. Although the six brothers always get tangled up in silly arguments, they certainly weren't stupid,

and had long noticed what had been happening between Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan, like how the waterside flower pined for love from the brook by sending the many shed petals, while the heartless brook simply babbles on unrequited love. So when they had finally caught the flaw in Lin Pingzhi's words, they spared no efforts driving a wedge between Yue and Lin.

"You are just talking rubbish. I am not listening! I am not listening to any of it!" covering her ears with her hands, Yue Lingshan shouted.

"Miss Yue, it's quite alright if you really want to marry that Little Lin, but if so, there's this one special Kung Fu you've got to learn. This Kung Fu is going to be so important for you that if you miss the chance of learning it, I bet you that you are going to regret it for the rest of your life," Root Fairy claimed.

"What Kung Fu is that? Why is it so important for me?" Noticing the sincerity in Root Fairy's voice, Yue Lingshan simply couldn't resist her curiosity but ask.

"That 'Night Owl' Ji Wushi has this Kung Fu called 'Piece Parts Back into a Whole Art'," Root Fairy exclaimed. "Now when Little Lin eats all your ears, nose, fingers, and toes in the future, you don't have to worry no more. You can simply cut his stomach open and take those pieces out to put back onto your body, piecing parts back into a whole."

# **Chapter 16: Gaining Blood**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**A girl leaped out from the cabin of the small boat and stood on the bow smiling. She was dressed in a blue skirt with white flower patterns. Outside the skirt, she had an embroidered apron with many colorful and shining decorations. By the way she dressed, one can easily tell she was a minority girl.**

Amid the much drivel from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, the boat set sail toward the lower reaches of the Yellow River. It was almost the crack of dawn. Clouds of morning mist hovered above the billowing waves, extending infinitely into the far distance, free from inhibition, and creating a magnificent view for the passengers aboard the boat.

Gradually, the morning sun rose above the horizon, casting a golden shine on the boat while reflecting in the river below, creating glistening reflections in the shapes of thousands of snakes. A small boat in the distance hoisted its sail and traveled toward them head-on. Catching the easterly wind, full force, with the cyan sail, the small boat moved swiftly up the stream. The giant picture of a white foot was painted in the middle of the cyan sail. And after the small boat had come closer so that everyone could take a good glimpse at the picture, they all concluded that it was obviously the picture of a female's foot, judging from the fine shape and delicacy it had presented.

"Why would someone paint a foot on the sail? How bizarre?" the Huashan apprentices muttered among themselves.

"This boat most likely belongs to the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert," Branch Fairy announced. "Oops, Madam Yue, Miss Yue, you girls had better watch out! It couldn't have been any clearer - those guys on that boat are fond of eating girl's feet!"

Yue Lingshan spat at him in disgust, yet a slight panic had already started swelling inside her.

Minutes later, the small boat was well within sight, and the passengers on the big boat soon noticed the faint singing coming out of the small boat's cabin. The sound was gentle and soft, and the lyric was peculiar – no one could understand a word of it, while the tonality was so utterly intimate that it didn't sound like singing but rather moaning or groaning. And then, it changed, now more like the sound of a love ritual, ardent and lascivious to the extreme. The many young apprentices of the Huashan School all blushed with embarrassment as Madam Yue grunted in disgust, "What kind of monster is this?"

Suddenly, a girl's sweet voice floated out from inside the small boat, "Is Young Master Linghu of the Huashan Sword School aboard your boat?"

"Chong, pay no attention to her!" Madam Yue whispered.

"We'd really like to have a good look at Young Master Linghu if that's alright," the girl asked again, her voice so charming and agreeable as though it had carried some kind of magical power that could sway one's heart.

While the words still echoed in everyone's ears, a girl had leapt out from the small boat's cabin and stood on the bow of the boat, smiling. She was dressed in a blue skirt with white flower patterns. Outside the skirt, an embroidered apron with many colorful and shining decorations hung from her chest all the way to her knees, looking splendid in green and gold. The girl appeared to be around twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age. Her skin had a slightly yellowish tone, and her two eyes were much larger than average, the pupils pitch black. The pair of large gold earrings dangling from her ears was at least the size of a wine cup. The two ends of a multicolored waistband around her waist shot forward from the force of the wind, but she was actually standing there barefooted. Even though the girl had shown great charm, but after hearing her voice before actually seeing her look, it was only natural to think that the charming of her voice far exceeds the charming of her looks. The girl smiled at the

passengers on the big boat. By the way she dressed, one can easily tell that she was a minority girl.<sup>47</sup>

The boat carrying members of the Huashan School was traveling downstream, and it seemed as if it would have collided with the small boat when the small boat suddenly turned around in a swift maneuver. And after lowering the sail, the small boat now started traveling downstream side by side with the big boat.

Yue Buqun suddenly remembered something. “Miss, are you a subordinate of Chief Blue from the Five-Sylph Sect in Yunnan?”<sup>48</sup> he asked.

“You do have some insights. But you’ve only gotten half of it right. I am from the Five-Sylph Sect, indeed. But I am not a subordinate of Chief Blue,” the girl giggled and then replied in a soft tone.

Taking a few steps forward until he was at the bow of the boat, Yue Buqun cupped his hands in greeting.

“My name is Yue Buqun. Miss, would you be kind enough to inform me your respectable surname and enlighten me with your purpose in a detoured visit and the advice you will favor me today?”

“I am a Miao<sup>49</sup> girl. I don’t understand all your fancy talking there. What did you say?” The girl grinned.

“Miss, what’s your family name?” Yue Buqun asked again.

“You already know my family name. Why do you still ask me?” The girl chortled.

“I asked because I don’t really know your family name,” Yue Buqun explained.

“You are a grown up man. See, you’ve even got long goatees. Obviously you know my family name. Why make a scene and deny it?” The girl let out a big grin.

These words sounded quite disrespectful. But she kept smiling a most innocent grin on her face; her voice did not carry any trace of hostility.

“Miss, you must be joking with me,” Yue Buqun replied.

“Now Head Master Yue, what’s your family name?” the girl asked with a bright smile.

“Miss, you already know that my family name is Yue. Why ask while you know the answer?” Yue Buqun said uncomfortably.

Madam Yue had enough of the kind of frivolous dialogue. “Don’t pay attention to her,” she whispered to her husband.

Yue Buqun put his left hand behind his back and shook it a few times, signaling Madam Yue to stay put.

“Why is Mr. Yue shaking his hand behind his back?” Root Fairy became excited. “Oh, I see. Madam Yue told him to not pay attention to that girl, but after seeing how pretty and coquettish the girl is, he just wouldn’t listen to his wife and would rest at nothing but to pay a lot of attention to her.”

“Did you say that I am pretty and coque...something? Thanks a lot!” the girl said, chuckling. “Your Han girls are certainly prettier than us Miao girls.” Apparently she didn’t know that the word “coquettish” was actually a derogatory term, and was very pleased to hear others praising about her beauty. Then she turned to Yue Buqun. “You already know my family name. Why do you ask while you know the answer then?”

“Hey, what’s gonna happen when Mr. Yue doesn’t listen to his wife?” Branch Fairy muttered.

“It’s not gonna be good! Mark my word!” Flower Fairy concluded with an evil grin.

“Isn’t Mr. Yue’s nick name the ‘Gentleman Sword’?” Trunk Fairy joined in. “So he is no gentleman after all. He already knew what her name is, and still asks for it, again and again, trying to make conversation. I think he just wants to keep talking with the girl.”

Yue Buqun was greatly embarrassed by the remarks from the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies. These six brothers never watched their mouths; Heaven knew what more garbage might come out from their holes. And what impression would that leave the many apprentices when they hear this? But

knowing what kind of people the Peach Valley's Six Fairies were, he simply couldn't take it seriously. So he cupped his hands and spoke again.

"Will you please pass along my greetings to Chief Blue. Yue Buqun of the Huashan Sword School wishes Elder Blue good health."

That apparently shocked the girl. She opened her eyes even wider and rolled her eyes in disbelief.

"Why...why are you calling me 'Elder Blue'? Am I that old already?" she asked.

"Miss, you...you are the Chief Blue of the...Five-Sylph Sect?" It was Yue Buqun's turn to be completely shocked this time. He had known that the Five-Sylph Sect was a very sinister and vicious sect, and had always been referred to as the "Five-Venom Sect" among fellow martial people behind the back. When the sect was founded about a hundred years ago, it actually was named the "Five-Venom Sect," and the founder of the sect and the key members of the sect were all Miao minorities. Later when several Han members joined the sect, they were able to convey to the Miao members that "Five-Venom" was not such an elegant name and changed it to "Five-Sylph," instead. The "Five-Sylph Sect" specialized in using miasma, parasite, and venomous pests, and shared great fame with the "Hundred-Toxic Faction" - one leads the northern region and the other tops the southern region in their knowledge of poison. Among the many members of the Five-Sylph Sect, most were Miao minorities, and lacked the skills in scheming shown by their counterparts in the Hundred-Toxic Faction, but the way they use their poison were so eerie and creepy that they were simply unimaginable. The rumor in the Martial World said that when the Hundred-Toxic Faction had wanted to poison someone, even though it was impossible to guard against the attacks, after some careful investigation and deduction, one could still understand how the poison worked; on the other hand, when someone was poisoned by the Five-Sylph Sect, even if

the executor explained it in details, it would still be totally unbelievable and unimaginable. The uniqueness and the eeriness simply could not be reasoned using normal logic.

“I am Blue Phoenix. Didn’t you know that already?” the girl explained with a grin. “I told you that I am from the Five-Sylph Sect but not a subordinate of Chief Blue. Now other than Blue Phoenix, herself, who else would not be a subordinate of Blue Phoenix within the entire Five-Sylph Sect?” At that word, the girl broke into loud giggles.

The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies also broke out into loud laughter. “Mr. Yue is so slow. She pretty much told him, yet he keeps nagging away.”

The only thing Yue Buqun had known about the Five-Sylph Sect Chief was the last name Blue. Now after hearing what the girl had just said, he realized that the chief’s full name was Blue Phoenix. And the girl’s colorful and pattern-rich dress did make her look like a phoenix. At the time it was tradition for Han families to keep a girl’s maiden name secret. The maiden name would only be revealed the day when the prospect in-laws family proposed an engagement with gifts and performed the “Maiden Name Revelation” ceremony. Even though martial families in the Martial World didn’t quite stick to that tradition to the letter, they still wouldn’t just give it out randomly. But this Miao girl revealed her maiden name out right so easily in front of a large crowd on the river, without showing any trace of bashfulness. Though her demeanor was natural and graceful, at the mentioning of her own name, the tone of her voice became even softer and sweeter.

“So it is Chief Blue, herself, who has come personally. It is certainly my lack of manners to have not greeted your gracious presence appropriately. May I ask what Chief Blue has to teach me about?” Yue Buqun cupped his hands together again to salute.

“I am completely illiterate. What can I teach you? Unless you mean you can teach me. See, the way you dressed does

look like that of a schoolteacher. So you are thinking about teaching me to read, aren't you? I am too thickheaded. You Han people are all too cunning. I doubt I'd be able to learn all that," Blue Phoenix replied with a grin.

"Is she just acting dumb, or has she really no idea about standard polite greetings? Judging from the expression on her face, she doesn't seem to be putting on an act," Yue Buqun thought to himself. So he simply asked, "Chief Blue, why are you here?"

"Is Linghu Chong your apprentice brother or your apprentice?" Blue Phoenix asked.

"He is my apprentice," Yue Buqun answered.

"Hmm, is it alright if I take a good look at him?" Blue Phoenix requested.

"But he is in poor health and a state of delirium at the moment, and would be unsuitable of coming out to pay his respects." Yue Buqun wasn't too fond of the idea.

"Pay his respects?" Blue Phoenix uttered in surprise, opening her big round eyes even wider. "I don't need him to pay me respects. He is not a subordinate of my Five-Sylph Sect. Why would he need to pay me respects? Besides, he is that one...hehe...that one's good friend. Even if he does want to pay me respects, I don't deserve it. I heard that he drew his own blood to feed Old Man's daughter in order to save her life. Such kind of passionate and affectionate man is the kind we Miao girls admire the most. That's why I've gotten to take a look at him."

"Well...well...!" Yue Buqun hesitated.

"I know he is badly wounded and have lost a lot of blood. You don't have to call him out. I'll come over myself," Blue Phoenix suggested.

"We dare not request your gracious presence," Yue Buqun said hurriedly.

"Whatever!" Blue Phoenix chortled, and with a gentle leap, she landed on the big boat carrying the Huashan school members.

Yue Buqun noticed the grace and ease she had displayed from the leap, yet nothing suggested that she had any extraordinary Kung Fu skills. Taking two steps back, he blocked the entrance to the cabin, feeling deeply troubled. He knew that the Five-Sylph Sect would make a very tough adversary, and when fighting with such unorthodox sects it would take a lot more than true Kung Fu skills to win the battle. That was the reason why he had been very polite toward Blue Phoenix from the very beginning. The two members of the Hundred-Toxic Faction had mentioned the previous night that someone had asked them to shadow the Huashan School. Birds of a feather flock together. Most likely it was the Five-Sylph Sect that had asked them to do so. Why would the Five-Sylph Sect be hard on the Huashan School? The Five-Sylph Sect was a large faction in the Martial World. When the chief of the sect came personally, logically he shouldn't have blocked the way, but to let a person with all kinds of eerie poisons all over her body into the cabin was the last thing Yue Buqun would want. Figuring that Linghu Chong coming out to meet Chief Blue probably would be the best solution for now, he held his position steadily and shouted out.

"Chong! Chief Blue wants to see you. Come out, hurry!"

"Yes, Master!" Linghu Chong answered feebly. But since he had just lost a lot of blood recently, after hearing the calling from his Master, he couldn't even sit up and had to give up trying after failing a few pathetic attempts.

"I heard that he was seriously wounded. How could he come out?" Blue Phoenix objected. "It's very windy on the river. We don't want him to catch a cold on top of everything he is already suffering from, do we? I'll go inside to visit him."

Blue Phoenix started walking toward the entrance of the cabin. Only after a few steps, she was already within four feet from Yue Buqun and the strong scent of fragrance filled Yue Buqun's nostrils immediately. Turning slightly sideways, hesitantly, Yue Buqun spared enough room for Blue Phoenix



to get through and watched cautiously as she entered the cabin.

The Peach Valley's Six Fairies occupied the majority of the outer cabin, five of them sitting down cross-legged while Fruit Fairy lying on the bed.

"You must be the Peach Valley's Six Fairies? I am the chief of the Five-Sylph Sect, and you are the Six Fairies of the Peach Valley. Sylphs are fairies, too. We are one of the same kind!" Blue Phoenix grinned joyously.

"Not likely! We are real and you are fake!" Root Fairy challenged mockingly.

"Even if you were real, we have six fairies, one more than what you have," Trunk Fairy added.

"It wouldn't be that hard to turn that around, you know," Blue Phoenix beamed.

"How are you going to having one more than us? Are you changing the name of your sect to Seven-Sylph Sect?" Leaf Fairy asked curiously.

"We only have five sylphs, not seven. But we can reduce the six fairies to only four fairies, then naturally we would have one more than you guys, wouldn't we?" A nasty grin flashed across Blue Phoenix's face as she spoke.

"Reduce the six fairies to only four fairies? Are you saying that you are killing two of us?" Flower Fairy bellowed in fury.

"Kill or not, that's all up to us, isn't it? But I heard that you are friends of Linghu Chong, I guess we can let that pass. But you'll have to stop boasting yourself and claim that you have one more fairy than my Five-Sylph Sect," Blue Phoenix let out a triumphant smile.

"We love boasting ourselves. What'cha gonna do?" Trunk Fairy snapped.

All of a sudden, Root Fairy, Trunk Fairy, Leaf Fairy and Flower Fairy all leapt to their feet and each grabbed onto one of her limbs, but before they were able to lift her up, all four of them cried out and all let go of her simultaneously as though following an inaudible command, each holding out

his palm and gazing at it in horror. Even Yue Buqun felt cold pricks all over his back when he took a quick glimpse of what the Fairies now had in their palms – two large emerald centipedes and two large spiders that had colorful stripes all over their bodies. The bodies of all four venomous pests were covered in long hairs, so disgusting that even a glance at them could make one sick. But the four venomous pests only moved slightly, and neither took a bite at the four Fairies. If they had bitten with their poisonous fangs, then the damage would have already been done, and they wouldn't have appeared as frightening. Just because they were now all alerted and provoked, and any slight movement could have prompt them to bite down with the poisonous fangs, the Peach Valley's Four Fairies dare not move an inch, and all froze right on the spot.

Blue Phoenix swung her arm conveniently, and the four venomous pests vanished all of a sudden. She must have put them away with the swing, but no one could tell where on her body did she store them. She paid no more attention to the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and walked further into the cabin. Having been frightened completely out of their wits, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies dared not speak another word.

Linghu Chong and the bunch of male apprentices of the Huashan School occupied the middle cabin. By then, Madam Yue and the many female apprentices had returned to the back cabin, and the clapboard between the middle cabin and the back cabin had been closed. After casting a casual glance at the many apprentices in the cabin, Blue Phoenix walked next to Linghu Chong's bed and called out gently.

“Young Master Linghu! Young Master Linghu!”

The gentleness and the affection carried in her voice seemed to have reached the extreme. As the sweet sound echoed in everyone's ears, each felt a soul-stirring sensation surging through his entire body, and almost couldn't help but answer, as if she had been calling him, not Linghu Chong. After these two calls, over half of the male

apprentices found themselves red in the face and their bodies quivering slightly.

"Who...who are you?" Linghu Chong opened his eyes slowly and asked in a barely audible voice.

"I am a friend of your good friend, so I am your friend, too," Blue Phoenix answered tenderly.

Linghu Chong acknowledged with a slight groan and then closed his eyes.

"Young Master Linghu, I know you've lost a great amount of blood. But don't worry, you won't die," Blue Phoenix said. But in his daze, Linghu Chong didn't reply.

Reaching under Linghu Chong's quilt, Blue Phoenix pulled his hand out and started checking his pulse, but soon her eyebrows knitted into a straight line. Suddenly, she stuck her head out of the window, gave a whistle, and then jabbered out many words, which neither one inside the cabin could comprehend.

A short while later, four Miao girls entered the cabin. All of them were about eighteen years of age, and all dressed in blue skirts in white flower patterns, with an embroidered waistband around each waist. Each of them held in her hand an eight-inch long square box made of bamboo strips.

Yue Buqun frowned slightly, thinking that whatever the things in the Five-Sylph Sect members' hands were, they could not have been anything good. Just Blue Phoenix, by herself, already had many centipedes and spiders hidden on her. Now, when these four Miao girls carried these boxes into the cabin openly, all hell would probably break loose. But since they showed no sign of enmity, it would be inappropriate of him to stop them.

Walking over by Blue Phoenix's side, the four Miao girls whispered something to her, and after getting a nod back, they opened the boxes. People in the cabin found their curiosity growing rapidly, all were eager to find out what kind of queer things might be stored in the boxes, except Yue Buqun, who was the only one who had seen the hairy

venomous insects in Peach Valley's Four Fairies' palms, and only wished that he would never have to get a glimpse of the things inside the boxes. But suddenly, the strangest thing happened.

The four Miao girls rolled their sleeves high, exposing the snow-white arms, and then they also rolled their trouser legs high, until they were above their knees.<sup>50</sup> The many male apprentices of the Huashan School were stupefied as they gaped at the unusual sight, their hearts pounding madly.

"Oh, no!" Yue Buqun thought secretly. "These girls from this heretical sect want to perform some kind of evil enchantment and use lust to tempt my apprentices. Just the voice of that Blue Phoenix, alone, was already utterly lascivious, if she performed any kind of black art on top of that, having not enough self-control, the many apprentices would undoubtedly fall for it." He couldn't help clutching the handle of his sword, determined to put a stop to it if these members of the Five-Sylph Sect were to undress themselves and perform any witchcraft.

After the four Miao girls rolled up their sleeves and trouser legs, Blue Phoenix also rolled her trouser legs up unhurriedly. Yue Buqun winked at the many apprentices, signaling them to retreat out of the cabin, so as not to be perplexed by the evil enchantment, but only Lau Denuo and Shi Daizi followed his command. Among the rest apprentices, some walked a few steps hesitantly toward the outside before returning to the original spot, and some others simply froze there, lost in trance.

Yue Buqun gathered his inner energy around his lower abdomen and loaded his "Divine Art of Violet Twilight." Soon, a shade of violet color flashed across his face. He knew that the Five-Venom Sect had been entrenched in the southern region for over two hundred years, and their notoriety did not come by accident. Undoubtedly, they knew certain vicious and venomous sorcery. And when the chief, herself, was performing the sorcery, it was no trivial matter. If he didn't

guard his mind with the divine art, any slight oversight might have caused him to fall for her tricks. Seeing with his own eyes how these Miao girls exposed themselves in public, with no regard to dignity and having no sense of shame, Yue Buqun became more and more worried. To die of poison was one thing, but what he feared the most was to lose his clear conscience under the evil spell and bring shame to himself in the presence of everyone. If that ever happened, the reputation of the Huashan Sword School and the Gentleman Sword would have been completely ruined beyond redemption. He watched on as the four Miao girls each took something out of the box, something that wriggled back and forth in their hands. Just as he had expected, these had to be some kind of venomous worms. The four Miao girls placed these venomous worms on their exposed arms and legs, and as soon as the worms were set loose, they clung tightly to the skins.

Fixing his eyes on the worms, Yue Buqun soon realized that those weren't venomous worms, but rather blood-sucking leeches that were quite common in creeks or lakes of the countryside, except that these leeches were twice the size of a regular one. One after another, the Miao girls took out more and more leeches from the boxes. Blue Phoenix also took out some leeches from one of the bamboo boxes, and placed them on her own arms and legs. In only a few moments, the five girls' arms and legs were completely covered by leeches; there were at least over two hundred of them in total. All the onlookers were dumbstruck, and neither had a clue as to what kind of strange scheme these five were up to.

Madam Yue had been in the back cabin, but after hearing the many cries of surprise uttered by the male apprentices in the middle cabin, she couldn't help pulling the clapboard open and taking a glimpse, herself, and as soon as her eyes met the bizarre scene, she also let out a cry of surprise.

“Don’t be afraid. They won’t bite you,” Blue Phoenix comforted her with a smile. “Are you...are you Mr. Yue’s woman? I heard that you have outstanding sword skills. Is that true?” she asked.

Madam Yue squeezed out a smile, but didn’t answer. When Blue Phoenix had first asked if she were Mr. Yue’s woman, it sounded very crude. And then, when she asked about whether Madam Yue’s sword skills were truly outstanding, Madam Yue hesitated. If it had been someone else who had asked the same question, even if that person were hostile, she would have answered humbly. This Blue Phoenix evidently knew very little about conventions of Han Chinese; if Madam Yue had answered that yes, she did have outstanding sword skills, it would sound very arrogant; if she had answered that no, she didn’t have outstanding sword skills, perhaps this Blue Phoenix would have believed it, and would look down upon her. With these thoughts in mind, she decided to simply reply with silence. Blue Phoenix didn’t ask any further and simply stood there quietly.

In the meantime, Yue Buqun found himself on full alert. If the five Miao girls had any unusual action, he was ready to strike. To catch bandits first capture the ringleader. He would have taken Blue Phoenix down before anything else. By then, nobody in the cabin spoke another word; the only sounds were the heavy breathing from the many male apprentices of the Huashan School.

After a long while, the bodies of the many leeches on the five Miao girls’ arms and legs started to puff up and soon turned into a faint reddish color. Yue Buqun knew that as soon as a leech touched the skin of a person or an animal, it would make a tight grip using its sucker disk, and then start sucking blood, not letting go until it was completely full. When the leech was sucking blood from someone, the person would, at most, feel only a slight itch or numbness. When farmers worked in the paddy fields, they would often have

leeches clinging to their legs, sucking blood out of them without their notice.

“Why are these witches using leeches to suck their own blood?” he muttered to himself. “Perhaps in order to perform their enchantment, the Five-Sylph Sect members must use their own blood. It seems that the time when these leeches have sucked enough blood will be the time they execute their enchantment.”

Blue Phoenix gently lifted up the quilt covering Linghu Chong’s body. Pulling a leech that was about nine tenth full off her arm, she placed it on Linghu Chong’s neck next to an artery.

“Hey, what are you doing?” afraid that she might harm Linghu Chong in anyway, Madam Yue yelled hurriedly. Unsheathing her long sword, she leapt into the middle cabin.

“No hurry! Let’s wait!” Yue Buqun shook his head.

Clutching her long sword tightly, Madam Yue gazed fixedly at Blue Phoenix and Linghu Chong. As soon as the leech was placed on Linghu Chong’s neck, it bit onto his artery and started sucking again. Blue Phoenix took out a small china bottle from her chest pocket and unplugged the lid. Using the pointed fingernail of the little finger on her right hand, she picked a little bit of the white powdery substance from the bottle and then sprinkled some onto the leech’s body. The other four Miao girls unbuttoned Linghu Chong’s robe and also rolled his sleeves and trouser legs up, then they started taking the many leeches off themselves and planting them next to the many arteries on Linghu Chong’s chest, stomach, arms and legs. Within a short moment, the over two hundred leeches had all been transferred onto Linghu Chong’s body. Blue Phoenix kept on picking more of the white powder and sprinkling a little bit of it on each and every of the leeches. Then, something very strange happened.

While clinging to the five Miao girls, the more those leeches sucked, the more they puffed up, but now, they all

started shrinking little by little. Yue Buqun suddenly understood. Feeling much relaxed, he exhaled a long breath.

"Turned out that they are just using the leeches as the medium to transfer their blood into Chong's arteries," he thought loud. "I wonder what are these white powders made of. How can they have made leeches give out blood? How miraculous!"

Having figured it out, he gradually relaxed the grip on the sword handle. Madam Yue also returned her sword to its sheath gently as a smile crept onto her once tightened face.

Even though the cabin was still swept with silence, it was far from the tension-filled atmosphere just a minute ago, when fierce battle could have been triggered at any moment. And furthermore, even the Peach Valley's Six Fairies were utterly amazed by what they saw, their jaws dropping and their mouths wide open. Since all six mouths were wide open and could not close because of the dropped jaws, naturally, neither of them could make any remark about it nor argue about it. This had to be a very rare occurrence.

After another short while, a light clatter broke the silence as one of the leeches, which had spilled out all the blood in its stomach, fell onto the cabin floor, wriggled a few times, and then dropped dead. One of the Miao girls picked it up and threw it into the river through the cabin window. Soon, more and more leeches fell dead and were thrown into the river one after another. Within thirty minutes, all leeches had been thrown out of the window, and the once toast tan face of Linghu Chong now showed a slight redness of skin. The blood those over two hundred leeches had sucked and transferred into Linghu Chong's body amounted to about a bowl's worth. Even though it would not have made up for all the blood Linghu Chong had lost, it was enough to turn the corner for him.

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue exchanged a glance at each other, both thinking, "Being the Chief of a good-sized sect, this Miao girl didn't even hesitate to transfer her own blood



into Chong's body. Since she had never met Chong before, she couldn't have fallen in love with him. She mentioned that she was a friend of Chong's good friend. When did Chong make friends with such an important and influential person?"

Blue Phoenix also noticed the improvement in Linghu Chong's complexion. After checking his pulses again and feeling that his pulses had become stronger, she was very pleased.

"Young Master Linghu, how do you feel?" she asked in a gentle voice.

Although Linghu Chong didn't quite understand everything, he, at least, had figured out that the girl was healing him, and also felt much improvement in spirit. "Thank you, Miss. I...I feel much better," he replied.

"Do I look very old? Am I too old already?" Blue Phoenix asked.

"Who said that you are old? Of course you are not! If it's alright with you, I'll make bold to call you a younger sister," Linghu Chong replied.

Blue Phoenix was overjoyed; her face split into a big smile as if a beautiful spring flower had just blossomed, which made it more delicate and charming.

"You are wonderful! No wonder! No wonder the one who didn't care about any other man in this world cares about you so much. That's why...alas...," she said with a smile.

"If you really think I am that wonderful, why don't you call me 'big brother Linghu'?" Linghu Chong grinned.

"Big brother Linghu," Blue Phoenix called out, as a slight blush shot up her face.

"My good sister! My wonderful sister!" Linghu Chong called out with a big smile.

Linghu Chong had always been the unconventional type, and never bothered about small matters, very different from Yue Buqun, who always posed as a "Gentleman." As soon as he regained consciousness, he had already known that Blue Phoenix liked to hear others calling her young and beautiful.

When she had asked him frankly, even though she was older than him, he still called her a “younger sister,” thinking that since she spared no effort at healing him, it would be totally justifiable for him to give some compliments to repay her kindness. Not surprisingly, Blue Phoenix’s face lit up at these words.

But Yue Buqun and Madam Yue couldn’t help frowning, both thinking, “Chong is so frivolous, and there is really no cure for that. Didn’t Ping One-Finger say that he only has one hundred days left for this life? Now it’s even less than one hundred days. It wouldn’t be exaggerating to say that one of his feet has already stepped into the coffin, yet only moments after he regained consciousness, he was already teasing such a lascivious woman with nonsense.”

“Big brother, do you want to eat something? Why don’t I get you some pastries?” Blue Phoenix asked, smiling brightly.

“I don’t feel like eating pastries. But some wine would be great,” Linghu Chong answered.

“That’s easy! We have the ‘Five Jewels Nectar Wine’ that we made ourselves. You can give that a try.”

Blue Phoenix jabbered out some words in the Miao dialect, and two of the Miao girls returned to the small boat, soon returning with eight bottles of wine. After uncorking one of the bottles, they poured the wine into a bowl, and instantly, the sweet scent of wine and blossom filled the entire cabin.

“My good sister, there’s something about your wine. The sweet scent of blossom is too strong. It completely overwhelmed the flavor of the wine itself. I guess this must have been the wine for women,” Linghu Chong said.

“The scent of blossom has to be very strong, otherwise, the wine will have this fishy smell of venomous snakes,” Blue Phoenix answered with a grin.

“The wine will have the fishy smell of venomous snakes?” Amazed, Linghu Chong asked.

“Certainly! This wine of mine is named the ‘Five Jewels Nectar Wine,’ then of course we need to use the ‘Five Jewels’.”

“What are the ‘Five Jewels’?”

“The ‘Five Jewels’ are five different kinds of treasures in our sect. Have a look.”

Setting up two empty bowls, Blue Phoenix turned the bottle upside down and poured the rest of the wine into the bowls. Clattering sounds rose as a few small objects fell into the bowl, and at the sight of them, several Huashan apprentices screeched in terror.

Blue Phoenix took the bowl of wine in front of Linghu Chong. The wine had a very light color, almost as clear as water from a natural spring in the mountains. Soaked in the wine were five tiny venomous pests: a green snake, a centipede, a spider, a scorpion, and a small toad.

This sight also gave Linghu Chong a good scare. “Why do you put...put these venomous pests in your wine?” he asked.

“These are the Five Jewels. Don’t call them venomous pests,” Blue Phoenix let out a disgruntled snort. But soon she asked, “Big brother Linghu, are you brave enough to drink this?”

“Well, I am a bit afraid of these...Five Jewels.” Linghu Chong confessed with a wry smile.

Raising the bowl of wine high, Blue Phoenix drank a big gulp of it. “We Miao people have this custom. When we invite a friend to drink wine and eat meat with us, if the friend refuses to drink or eat, then we don’t treat him as a friend no more.”

Taking the bowl from Blue Phoenix, Linghu Chong drank the entire bowl of wine in big gulps, swallowing the five venomous pests together with the wine down his throat. Although he had plenty of spunk, he dared not to chew on them.

Blue Phoenix was overjoyed. Embracing Linghu Chong’s neck into her arms, she gave two kisses on his left cheek,

leaving two red marks on his face from the lipsticks on her lips.

“That’s my good brother!” She beamed.

Linghu Chong also let out a smile, and then his heart skipped a beat when he suddenly noticed the stern look on his Master’s face from a glance with the corner of his eyes.

“Darn! That was audacious, running wild right in front of my Master and Master-Wife. Undoubtedly Master will give me a good scolding after this, and perhaps little apprentice sister will despise me even more,” he muttered to himself.

Blue Phoenix opened another bottle and refilled the bowl with wine, pouring the five venomous pests into the bowl as well. Handing the bowl in front of Yue Buqun, she said with a grin, “Mr. Yue, have some wine! My treat!”

Yue Buqun had already felt sick just from looking at the many venomous pests soaked in the wine. When he smelled the vague, indescribable fishiness covered by the strong scent of blossoms, he was seized with a sudden urge to vomit. Extending his left hand out, he pushed toward Blue Phoenix’s hand that was holding the wine bowl, but unexpectedly, Blue Phoenix didn’t draw her hands back. Seeing that his finger almost touched the back of her hand, Yue Buqun jerked his hand back.

“How come the Apprentice is even braver than the Master?” Blue Phoenix grinned. “Friends of the Huashan School, which one of you would like to drink up this bowl of wine? It will be of great benefit to you if you drink this.”

She held the bowl high with a hand. But there was only complete silence on the entire boat. There was no response.

Blue Phoenix heaved a long sigh. “I guess other than Linghu Chong, the Huashan School has not another true hero.”

“I’ll drink it!” a man suddenly shouted out. It was Lin Pingzhi, who stepped forward and reached out for the wine bowl.

Blue Phoenix expanded her eyebrows with a smile. "Well, turned out...."

"Little Lin," Yue Buqun suddenly yelled out. "If you eat those dirty things, even if you survive the poison, don't expect me to ever talk to you again."

"Go ahead, drink it up!" Blue Phoenix handed the bowl in front of Lin Pingzhi.

"I...I am not drinking it," Lin Pingzhi replied haltingly. Then hearing the loud laughter from Blue Phoenix, he went scarlet in the face. "It's not...it's not because I am afraid of death that I am not drinking the wine," he mumbled.

"I know! You are only afraid that this pretty girl will stop seeing you. You are not a coward. You are an affectionate lover. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" Blue Phoenix laughed out loud. Walking next to Linghu Chong, she said, "Big brother, I'll see you around."

She set down the bowl on the table and then waved. Getting the command, the four Miao girls collected the rest six bottles of wine, followed her out of the cabin, and then leapt back onto the small boat. Once again, sweet and intimate singing rose and floated above the water. Following the flow of the tide, the small boat soon gained speed and went further and further. The sounds of the singing also faded gradually and eventually died away.

"Throw all those bowls and bottles in the river," Yue Buqun ordered with a frown.

"Yes, Master!" Lin Pingzhi answered and walked next to the table. Just when his fingers barely touched the wine bottle, a strong fishy odor suddenly shot up his nostrils. His body gave a sudden shake, and he almost lost his footing and had to grab onto the side of the table for support.

"The wine bottles are poisonous," Yue Buqun realized at once and yelled out loudly. He swung his sleeve toward the table. The force from the swing sent all the bowls and bottles on the table flying through the window and falling into the river. Suddenly, he felt a strong feel of nausea coming from

his chest, and only after gathering a good amount of inner energy, were he able to hold it back. Then he heard a loud cry, as Lin Pingzhi burst out vomiting. Only seconds later, cries after cries rose as more and more people joined Lin Pingzhi and started throwing up wildly, even the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and the sailors at the stern of the boat were no exceptions. After fighting the urge forcefully for half a day, Yue Buqun could no longer endure the sickness and also started vomiting, himself. The many people kept vomiting back and forth. Even after they have spat out all the food inside their stomachs, the retching feeling did not go away, and they started vomiting up gastric juice, instead. And then after there was no more gastric juice left for them to spit out, the itching at their throats and the retching feeling inside their stomachs still remained. Everyone felt as though it would have been much better if they had something inside their stomach, so they have something to spit out, compared to vomiting again and again with an empty stomach. Among the dozens of people aboard the boat, Linghu Chong was the only one who didn't throw up.

"Linghu Chong, that witch regards you with special respect. She must have fed you the antidote," Fruit Fairy said.

"I didn't take an antidote. Could that bowl of poisonous wine have been the antidote?" Linghu Chong muttered.

"That has got to be it. That witch saw that you are a handsome lad and fell for you," Root Fairy concluded.

"Nah! I don't think it was because he's a handsome lad. It was because he praised that witch, saying that she was young and beautiful and all that," Branch Fairy disagreed.

"Well, he still had to be brave enough to drink up the poisonous wine, and swallow those five venomous bugs, hadn't he?" Flower Fairy added.

"He is not throwing up. But how do you know that it wasn't because he is even more seriously poisoned than the

rest of us with those five venomous bugs inside his stomach?" Leaf Fairy speculated.

"Oh, no, that's terrible!" Branch Fairy cried out. "When Linghu Chong drank the poisonous wine, we didn't stop him, or even say anything about it. If he dies from the poison, what are we gonna do when Ping One-Finger finds out about it?"

"Ping One-Finger said he was going to die soon, anyway. What's the big deal if he dies a few days earlier?" Root Fairy shrugged it off.

"It's no big deal for Linghu Chong, but it will be a big deal for us," Flower Fairy exclaimed.

"Don't worry! We'll just take it on the lam. That Ping One-Finger is a fatty with short legs. I am sure he won't be able to keep up with us," Fruit Fairy comforted him.

Even while vomiting left and right, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies didn't want to give up arguing.

Noticing that the sailor operating the rudder also kept vomiting non-stop and the boat had been shaking back and forth dangerously, Yue Buqun leapt to the back of the boat and steered the boat toward the south bank. He had resourceful of inner energy. After circulating his inner energy a few times, the retching feeling in his chest gradually decreased. Slowly the boat pulled over by the bank. Yue Buqun jumped to the bow of the boat and threw the iron anchor down the river. The iron anchor was well over two hundred pounds, and would have taken two sailors to carry it. Seeing that Yue Buqun, who looked just like a gentle and feeble scholar, was able to not only pick the iron anchor up with just one hand, but also throw it dozens of feet away without sparing much effort, the boatmen were left breathless. But that didn't last very long, because they soon had to return to their miserable vomiting routine. Everybody went ashore one after another. Kneeling by the river, they drank a stomach full of water and then spit them out. After several cycles, the vomiting finally stopped.

The section of the bank where they had parked the boat was a desolate and out-of-the-way spot, but several miles east from where they were, rolls of houses and buildings glowed in the sunshine from the distance – it appeared to be a town.

“There is still residual poison on the boat; we can’t use the boat any more. Let’s go to that town first and then we’ll figure something out,” Yue Buqun suggested.

With Trunk Fairy carrying Linghu Chong on his back and Branch Fairy carrying Fruit Fairy on his back, the group walked toward the town in the distance. After they entered town, in the van of everybody else, Trunk Fairy and Branch Fairy walked into a restaurant. Setting Linghu Chong and Fruit Fairy down onto two benches, they shouted immediately.

“Waiter! Waiter! Bring us some wine, some dish, and some rice!”

In a casual glance, Linghu Chong suddenly noticed somebody, and his heart skipped a beat. A short Taoist Priest sat up straight in the middle of the dining hall – it was none other than the Head Master of Qingcheng, Yu Canghai.

The Head Master of Qingcheng apparently was in the middle of a tight encirclement. He sat by a small table, on top of which lay a wine kettle, a pair of chopsticks, three plates of light snacks, and a shiny long sword showing its naked blade.

Seven benches surrounded the small table, a person sitting on each of them. Among the seven people, some were men and some were women, but all faces looked vicious and cruel. Each of the benches also had weapons on top of it. The seven of them simply gazed at Yu Canghai, neither of them making any sound.

The Head Master of Qingcheng appeared to be well composed. When he raised his wine cup for a sip with his left hand, the sleeves didn’t show the slightest sign of quiver.



"This short priest must be very frightened in his heart," Root Fairy commented.

"Of course he is. It's seven against one. He doesn't have a chance to win," Branch Fairy added.

"If he isn't afraid, why is he holding the wine cup with his left hand, not his right hand? Certainly he wants to spare his right hand, in case he has to grab on to his sword real quickly," Trunk Fairy said.

At that comment, Yu Canghai let out a disgruntled snort, and then handed the wine cup from his left hand to his right hand.

"He heard second brother's words, but didn't even dare to look at second brother. I'd say he is afraid, indeed. I am not saying that he is afraid of second brother. He is afraid that if he gets distracted, the seven enemies would attack all at once, and he would end up being chopped into eight pieces," Flower Fairy speculated.

"This short priest is already so small, if he gets chopped into eight pieces, isn't he going to be even smaller?" Leaf Fairy chortled.

Although Linghu Chong bore a grudge against Yu Canghai, seeing that Yu was surrounded by tough enemies, he didn't want to take advantage of Yu's situation.

"Six Fairy Brothers, this Priest is the Head Master of Qingcheng," he said.

"Head Master of Qingcheng? Big deal! Is he a friend of yours?" Root Fairy asked.

"I dare not make friends with his high social position. He is not my friend," Linghu Chong answered.

"Great! If he is not your friend, then we've gotten a good show going here!" Trunk Fairy grinned.

"Bring me some wine! Hurry up! I want to enjoy my wine while watching how the short priest will be chopped into nine pieces," Flower Fairy shouted, smacking the table in front of him loudly.

"Why nine pieces?" Leaf Fairy asked.

“Look at that mendicant monk over there. He is wielding two Tiger-Head Machetes, that’s why he’ll produce one more piece,” Flower Fairy explained.

“That’s not likely. Some of these people use a Wolf-Fanged Hammer and some others use a Golden Cane. How are they going to chop?” Leaf Fairy argued.

“Let’s be quiet,” Linghu Chong urged. “We are not helping either side. Let’s not distract Master Yu, the Head Master of the Qingcheng Sword School.”

The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies stopped talking, and all stared at Yu Canghai with fixed eyes and big grins on their faces.

One by one, Linghu Chong surveyed at the seven people who surrounded Yu Canghai. The first one was a mendicant monk, his long hair well reaching his shoulder. A shining copper hoop on his head bound the long hair together, and a pair of crescent shaped Tiger-Head Machetes sat on the side of his table. Sitting at the next bench was a woman in her fifties. Her hair had patches of grey, and her face was covered by some kind of a grim complexion. She had a two-foot long short knife lying by her side. Next to her were a monk and a Taoist priest. A red frock, as red as blood, draped over the monk’s shoulder, and an alms-bowl and a cymbal lay silently by his side. Both the alms-bowl and the cymbal were made of fine steel. The steel cymbal had very sharp edges – obviously it was a formidable weapon. The Taoist priest had a tall build. An octagonal Wolf-Fanged Hammer, which appeared to be very heavy, sat on his bench next to him. On the bench to the right of the Taoist priest sat a middle-aged beggar with his legs stretched out, and two green snakes coiled around his head and his shoulders. Both of the snakes had triangular shaped heads; their long tongues shot in and out viciously. The last two were a man and a woman. The man had a blind left eye while the woman had a blind right eye. Each had a cane leaning against his or her bench. The bodies of the two canes were extra thick and

shined with a glistening golden color. If they were truly made of gold, the weight would have been extraordinary. Both the man and the woman were in their forties, and looked just like any down-hearted wanderers in the Martial World, yet they carried with them such expensive canes, making an unspeakably eerie scene.

The mendicant monk fixed his eyes at Yu Canghai with ferocious stares, and slowly he reached out with both hands and grabbed onto the handles of the two machetes. The beggar took off the snake around his neck and then coiled it on his right arm, aiming the head of the snake at Yu Canghai. The other monk picked up his steel cymbal, the Taoist priest lifted his Wolf-Fanged Hammer, and the middle-aged woman also placed the short knife in her grip. Obviously, they were ready to launch a synchronized attack.

“Winning by numbers, isn’t that the old trick of you heretical, evil demons? Bring it on! Yu Canghai is not afraid of you.” Yu Canghai let out a hollow laugh.

“Yu Canghai, we don’t want to kill you,” the one-eyed man suddenly spoke.

“That’s right. As long as you behave yourself and hand over the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,’ we’ll let you leave with no troubles,” the one-eyed woman exclaimed.

Yue Buqun, Linghu Chong, Lin Pingzhi, and Yue Lingshan were all taken by big surprise when they heard the woman mentioning the “Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,” neither had expected that the reason these seven people had surrounded Yu Canghai was actually for the sake of the “Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.” They exchanged a few stares among themselves; all had the same thought in their minds: “Could this ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript’ really be in Yu Canghai’s hands?”

“Why wasting time with this dwarf? Let’s whack him first and then search his body,” the middle-aged woman said in a chilling tone.

"Maybe he hid it in a secret spot. If we can't find it on him after we whack him, wouldn't that be too bad?" the one-eyed woman said.

"If we can't find it, we can't find it. It's not going to be any worse." The middle-aged woman curled her lips. She spoke in such an indistinct manner, turned out that more than half of her teeth were already gone.

"Yu Canghai, if you listen to my advice, you'd better give it up. This sword art manuscript is not yours to start with, anyway. You've already had it for so many days. I am sure you've read it so many times that you probably have memorized everything. Why still hold on to it so tight? What good does it do for you?" the one-eyed woman persuaded.

But Yu Canghai did not say a word, only gathering his inner energy around his lower stomach, absorbed in the pre-battle preparation.

Right at that moment, sounds of laughter floated in from outside as a man with all smiles walked in the door. The man was dressed in a long pongee robe. The top of his head was already half bald, but the beard under his chin did not have a sprinkle of grey. His clothes looking costly and luxurious, his face glowing with health, the man looked like a merchant prince. Holding an emerald snuff bottle in his left hand and a one-foot long folding fan in his right hand, the chubby man had an affable expression on his face.

After spotting the many people upon entering the restaurant, he was taken by surprise, and his smiles shrank back a little, but only seconds later, he was all smiles, once again.

"How fortunate! How fortunate! I had not expected that all the heroes of the present time have gathered here today. I must consider myself very fortunate, indeed!" he cupped his hands in greeting, his face beaming. "Now, which good breeze has brought the Master Yu of the Qingcheng Sword School here to the Henan Province?" he said to Yu Canghai. "I've long heard that the 'Pine-Wind Sword Art' of the Qingcheng Sword School is a unique and superb Kung Fu

style of the Martial World. It looks like we are finally going to have the chance to broaden our horizons today."

But Yu Canghai still focused on loading his inner energy and paid no attention to him.

Turning toward the one-eyed man and the one-eyed woman, the man cupped his hands with a big grin. "I have not seen the 'Tung Cypress Whiz Duo' wandering about the Martial World for a good while. Looks like you've made a good fortune in the last few years."

"You flatter us. It's nothing compare to what Mr. You makes," the one-eyed man answered with a slight smile.

The man uttered three laughs at those words. "I've only gotten a facade. Whatever I earn with one hand, I spend with the other. Just from my nickname, people can tell that I only look good on the surface, but very hollow inside."

"What is your nickname?" Branch Fairy couldn't help but ask.

The man cast a glance toward Branch Fairy and soon found six strange looking fellows all staring at him curiously, but he had no clue as to who these six were and where they had come from.

"I have a very ugly nickname called 'Slippery and Hard to Grip'," he chortled as he spoke. "People say that I love to make friends, and for the sake of friendship, I never stint money and have no problem spending them. Hence, although I make good money, they don't stay in my hands long, because I don't have a good grip of them."

"Doesn't this friend You Xun, here, have another nickname?" the one-eyed man cut in.

"Really? How come I've never heard of it?" You Xun grinned.

"Loach Soaked in Oil, Slippery and Hard to Grip!" a cold voice suddenly spoke. The voice sounded indistinct, then, of course, it was the voice of the woman, who had lost over half of her teeth.

“Holy cow!” Flower Fairy yelled out. “A loach, itself, is extremely slippery, already. Now when it’s soaked in oil, who can ever get a good grip onto that?”

“That’s only because friends in the Martial World were flattering me, praising about my Qing-Gong skills, saying that I am as quick as a loach. But it is really embarrassing. This little Kung Fu of mine is really not worth mentioning. Madam Zhang, you are looking extremely good these days!” You Xun beamed at the woman and then bowed down deeply.

“What a glib tongue you have there. Stay away from me,” the old woman Madam Zhang turned the whites of eye up and yelled.

The man named You Xun must have had a very good temper. Hearing those harsh words, he didn’t show a slight sign of annoyance, and turned to the beggar, instead.

“Double-Dragon Divine Beggar, brother Yan! The two green dragons of yours are looking even more vigorous and nimble now.”

The beggar’s name was Yan Sanxing, and his nickname was actually “Double-Snake Ruthless Beggar,” but You Xun changed it into “Double-Dragon Divine Beggar” on the fly. Even though the Yan Sanxing was a very vicious and ruthless man, he couldn’t help but smile at those words.

You Xun also knew the longhaired mendicant monk Chou Songnian, monk Xi Bao, and Taoist Priest Yu Ling, and also said some praising words to each of them. While laughing and joking, he had eased up the tense atmosphere at swords’ points in the short amount of time.

“Hey, Loach Soaked in Oil! Why didn’t you say anything about us, praising the six brothers of us for our excellent Kung Fu and outstanding skills?” Leaf Fairy suddenly yelled out.

“That’s...that’s of course something I’d praise about...,” You Xun replied with a smile. But before he even had a chance to finish his sentence, all of a sudden, his two wrists and two ankles were already in the grips of Root Fairy, Trunk

Fairy, Branch Fairy, and Leaf Fairy the four fairies, who immediately lifted him off the ground without pulling hard.

“What wonderful Kung Fu! What brilliant skills! Such superb techniques are so rare through out the ages!” You Xun praised hurriedly.

“Why are our Kung Fu skills so rare through out the ages?” Root Fairy and Branch Fairy asked at the same time.

“My nick name is ‘Slippery and Hard to Grip.’ Frankly speaking, no one could have gotten a tight grip on me. But as soon as the four of you reached out with your hands, you caught me with such ease, and I became neither slippery, nor hard to grip. The Kung Fu skills you have demonstrated with are so exceptional that through out the ages, no one had every seen or hear about Kung Fu skills this great. When I wander about the world after today, I simply have to publicize the six great Kung Fu masters’ names wherever I go, so that everyone in the Martial World would know that there are such extraordinary heroes in this world.” You Xun explained.

The six Fairies were overjoyed. Wasting not another second, they immediately set him down to the ground.

“Slippery and Hard to Grip! You certainly deserve the reputation. See, didn’t you just get out of the grip once again?” Madam Zhang said coldly.

“That’s only because the six great Kung Fu masters had exceptional Kung Fu skills. I admire them so very much!” You Xun answered. “But I am so ignorant. I don’t even know what the names of the six senior masters are. May I ask what your respectful names are?”

“We are six brothers called ‘The Peach Valley’s Six Fairies’,” Root Fairy explained. “I am Root Fairy. He is Trunk Fairy.” Soon, he had introduced the names of all six of them.

“That’s wonderful! Wonderful! The name ‘Fairy’ is so appropriate to go with the Kung Fu skills of the six of you. Only people with such magical and exceptional Kung Fu skills, which have risen above this world and attained

sainthood, are qualified to use the name 'Fairy'." You Xun applauded.

The Peach Valley's Six Fairies felt great rejoicing. "You are very smart and have very good insight. You are awesome!" they exclaimed in unison.

"Are you going to hand out the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' or not?" Glaring at Yu Canghai, Madam Zhang yelled. But Yu Canghai ignored her yet again.

"Oh, I see. So your dispute is over the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' But from what I heard, the sword art manuscript isn't in Master Yu's possession," You Xun said.

"Are you saying that you know who has it?" Madam Zhang asked.

"This person is very, very famous. If I speak his name out, I am afraid it will scare the wits out of you," You Xun exclaimed.

"Speak up!" the mendicant monk Chou Songnian yelled at him. "If you don't know the answer, then begone, and stop being a hindrance!"

"This great master must have had a bit too much of roasted pork or roasted lamp, and the extra internal heat is fuming the hot temper. My Kung Fu skills are very ordinary, but I certainly have very quick access to information. Whenever there are secret messages floating around the Martial World, it wouldn't be easy for them to get pass my eyes and ears without my noticing," You Xun replied, still beaming.

The Tung Cypress Whiz Duo, Madam Zhang, and the rest of the group all knew that You Xun was speaking the truth. This You Xun loved poking his nose into other people's affairs, and would spare no effort at making his way into every nook and corners for information. There weren't really much that he wouldn't know about in the Martial World. So they asked in unison, "Don't keep us guessing! Who on earth has the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?"



“Well, you all know my nick name – ‘Slippery and Hard to Grip.’ Whatever I earn with one hand, I spend with the other. To be frank with you, I have been completely broke for quite some days. But you, on the other hand, are all loaded moneybags. Now, it wasn’t easy for me to obtain this important information, and it looks like this is going to be a great opportunity for me. The old saying said it well: a sharp blade should be presented to a true man, and beautiful rouge should be given to a pretty woman. So important information, of course, should be sold to moneybags. I am not keeping you guessing. I am just waiting for the right offer.”

“Fine. Let’s kill Yu Canghai first, and worry about forcing the secret out of this loach later. Attack!” Madam Zhang shouted. As soon as the word “attack” was spoken, sounds of weapons rapidly colliding with each other echoed. The seven attackers had all left their benches and each exchanged a few moves with Yu Canghai. The attack stopped just as abruptly as how it had started. Within seconds, the seven attackers had retreated back to their original positions, still encircling Yu Canghai in the middle. Blood gushed out from the cuts on monk Xi Bao and monk Chou Songnian’s thighs. Yu Canghai had handed the sword to his left hand; the part of his robe near the right shoulder had been torn into pieces – the result of a heavy strike from one of the attackers.

“Again!” Madam Zhang shouted out, and the seven of them lunged forward all at once. Some more rapid clanking sounds exploded before the seven retreated back, once again, leaving Yu Canghai in the middle.

This time Madam Zhang took a hit on her face. A long cut dragged from the middle of her left eyebrow all the way down to her lower jaw. Yu Canghai also took a chop on his left arm. No longer able to wield the sword with his left hand, he handed the sword back to his right hand.

“Master Yu, we are both members of the Taoist Order. Why don’t you listen to my advice and surrender?” Priest Yu Ling raised his Wolf-Fanged Hammer and urged.

Yu Canghai let out an angry snort and cursed indistinctly.

Madam Zhang didn't even bother to wipe the blood off her face. Raising her short knife and aiming it at Yu Canghai, she shouted, "Once...."

Before she was able to spit out the word "again," a voice suddenly shouted out loudly, "Hold it!" A man rushed into the circle of attackers in quick strides and stopped right next to Yu Canghai.

"Seven against one, isn't that a bit unfair? Besides, didn't Mr. You clearly say that the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' was not in Yu Canghai's possession?" he said. It was Lin Pingzhi.

Ever since he caught Yu Canghai in his eyes, Lin Pingzhi never let Yu out of his sight for a single second. After watching Yu getting injured in both arms, he knew that another round of attack from Madam Zhang and the rest attackers would have chopped Yu Canghai into shreds. His hatred toward Yu Canghai was even deeper than the ocean. He had long vowed to kill this monster, one day, with his own hands, and would never have allowed Yu Canghai to die from other people's hands. That was why he immediately stepped forward and stopped the next round of attack.

"Who the hell are you? Do you want to die with him?" Madam Zhang snapped.

"No, I don't want to die with him. I just thought this is a bit unjust, and wanted to speak out in fairness to him. Why don't we stop fighting?" Lin Pingzhi answered.

"Let's just whack him, too," Chou Songnian suggested.

"Who are you, you bold and reckless brat? Do you always take on other people's trouble?" Priest Yu Ling snubbed.

"I am Lin Pingzhi of the Huashan Sword School....," Lin Pingzhi answered.

"You are from the Huashan Sword School? Where is Young Master Linghu?" the Tung Cypress Whiz Duo, the Double-Snake Ruthless Beggar, Madam Zhang, and the rest of the group all shouted in unison.

"I am Linghu Chong," Linghu Chong cupped his hands in greeting. "I am only a boorish youngster; I certainly do not deserve the title of a 'Young Master.' Are you acquainted with a friend of mine?"

Along the journey, many prominent masters with exceptional talents or eccentric behaviors had all showed great respects and made up to him, and all of them had claimed that it had been for the sake of a friend of his. All the while, Linghu Chong still had no clue as to when he had made such an infinitely resourceful friend. When he heard the seven asking about him, he had figured that it must have had something to do with this mystic friend, again. And sure enough, the group of seven all turned toward him and saluted respectfully.

"As soon as the seven of us received the message, we hurried over here, traveling days and nights, so we could have the honor to meet you. It's wonderful that we get to pay you a formal visit right here," Priest Yu Ling said.

Yu Canghai had been injured very badly. Finding out that the one who had stood up for him and helped him out of the predicament was actually Lin Pingzhi he was taken aback greatly. But it didn't take him long to figure out Lin Pingzhi's true intension. Seeing that the seven attackers were all in the middle of a conversation with Linghu Chong, he quickly made up his mind. He wasn't injured in his legs; so all of a sudden, he leapt backward and dashed into the back room of the small restaurant. Before anyone had any time to react, he had fled from the backdoor, speedily. Yan Sanxing and Chou Songnian both cried in surprise, but it was already too late to chase after him.

You Xun walked in front of Linghu Chong, beaming brightly. "When I came from the east," he said, "I heard many fellow martial friends mentioning about Young Master Linghu's great name. In my heart, I've been looking up to you for a long, long time. Then, when I heard that the dozens of chiefs and leaders from various sects, clans, caves, and

islands would be meeting Young Master Linghu on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge, I immediately hurried over to join in the fun. I certainly didn't expect that I'd be so lucky to have met Young Master ahead of everyone else. Don't worry! You can set your heart at a rest now. This time people are bringing at least a hundred different types of catholicon to the Five-Tyrant Ridge. The little injury of yours will be cured in no time. In no time! Ha-ha! Wonderful! Wonderful!" He took Linghu Chong's hands into his own and swayed gently as he spoke, looking utterly intimate.

"What dozens of chiefs and leaders from various sects, clans, caves, and islands? What one hundred types of catholicon are you talking about? I am at a complete loss," astounded, Linghu Chong asked hurriedly.

"Don't let unnecessary worry trouble you, Young Master Linghu. Even if my guts were as large as the Heavens, I would still dare not to talk recklessly about the reason behind. Young Master, you can just rest assured, ha-ha. I certainly dare not to talk nonsense. Even if you don't take offense, when the words get out and get into other people's ears, how many heads do I have? Even if I were ten times more slippery, sooner or later, somebody would have pulled my head off all the same."

"If you truly dare not talk nonsense, why have you brought this thing up again and again?" Madam Zhang snubbed with a gloomy face. "Whatever is happening on the Five-Tyrant Ridge, Young Master Linghu will see with his own eyes in just a short while. There is no need for you to be long-tongued here. Now, let me ask you one more time. Who on earth has that 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' at this very moment?"

You Xun pretended that he didn't hear the words from Madam Zhang. Turning toward the Yue Buqun couple, he grinned.

"Ever since I walked in the door and saw the two of you, I've been muttering to myself: This mister and this madam

both looked so dignified and elegant, showing a very distinguished demeanor. Which two eminent masters could the two of you have been? Since you are together with Young Master Linghu, I guess you must be the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School, the world-renowned 'Gentleman Sword,' Mr. Yue and Madam Yue."

"You flatter me," Yue Buqun replied with a slight smile.

"The common saying says: Have eyes but fail to see mount Taishan; entertain angel unawares. Today, I am really having eyes but fail to see mount Huashan," You Xun continued. "Recently, Mr. Yue blinded fifteen formidable foes with a simple swing of his sword. That feat shook the entire Martial World. I simply couldn't help but prostrate myself before you in admiration. What brilliant sword skills! Brilliant, indeed!"

He said these words so sincerely as though he had witnessed everything with his own eyes. Yue Buqun gave a suppressed snort as a gloomy look quickly flashed across his face.

"And Madam Yue, Heroine Ning...", You Xun went on, but was suddenly cut short by Madam Zhang.

"Are you ever gonna stop rambling? Speak up, who has the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?" Madam Zhang barked. She had heard the names of Yue Buqun and Madam Yue, yet didn't show a slight sign of concern.

"Give me one hundred taels of silver, and I'll tell you." You Xun stretched his hand out, his face split into a wide grin.

"You must have never seen money in your past life. It always has to do with money. Money this and money that!" Madam Zhang croaked.

The one-eyed man took a silver ingot out from his chest pocket and tossed it at You Xun. "This has got to cover it. Now, speak up!" he demanded.

Catching the silver ingot into his grip, You Xun weight it in his hand. "Many thanks! Come, let's go to the outside and

I'll tell you."

"Why go to the outside? You can tell us right here, so we can all hear about it," the one-eyed man replied.

"Yeah! That's right! Why do you have to be so sneaky?" all the audiences agreed in unison.

"No way! No way!" You Xun shook his head back and forth. "I asked for one hundred taels of silver. That's one hundred taels of silver per person, not that this piece of important news is only worth one hundred taels. How can I have sold it for so cheap? That's just outrageous!"

The one-eyed man gave a wave with his right hand, and at that signal, Chou Songnian, Madam Zhang, Yan Sanxing, Monk Xi Bo, and the rest of the group immediately stepped forward, circling You Xun in the middle the same way they had surrounded Yu Canghai a few minutes ago.

"His nickname is Slippery and Hard to Grip. We shall not fight him with bare hands. Let's use our weapons," Madam Zhang exclaimed grimly.

Priest Yu Ling picked up his octagonal shaped Wolf-Fanged Hammer and waved it. "Swoosh!" The hammer made a circle in the air.

"Let's see if his head is any slippery against my hammer."

The sharp and pointy wolf-fangs on the hammer glinted with reflection. Taking a good glimpse of the hammer, and then taking a good look at the shining and puffy head of You Xun, everybody came to the same conclusion – You Xun's head did not seem to have a very promising prospect.

"Young Master Linghu, only a few moments ago, a young friend from your respectful school helped Master Yu out of the tight spot with just a few words. Now when I am in deep trouble, why haven't you said anything to help, as though you didn't see anything or hear anything?" You Xun asked.

"If you don't speak out the whereabouts of the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' I am afraid I'll have to wade in and won't be so easy on you," Linghu Chong replied. At that word, a dull and depressing sensation rose from his stomach,

and he couldn't help but cast a side glance at Yue Lingshan, thinking, "Even you are wronging me for appropriating Little Lin's sword art manuscript."

"Excellent! Excellent! Young Master Linghu, please go ahead!" Madam Zhang and the rest of the group cheered all together.

You Xun heaved a deep sigh. "Fine, I'll speak it out. Go on, return to your seats. Why are you still surrounding me?"

"We'd better be extra cautious when dealing with the Slippery and Hard to Grip," Madam Zhang spat out.

"Alas, why did I bring trouble to myself? Why didn't I just wait on the Five-Tyrant Ridge to join the fun, and would rather come here to court death?" You Xun heaved another sigh.

"Are you gonna speak it out or not?" Madam Zhang snapped.

"I will! I will! Why not!" You Xun answered. "Hey! Chief Dongfang! When did your Excellence decide to show your gracious presence, here?" He said the last two sentences very loud and clear, and as he spoke, he fixed his eyes toward the west end of the street outside the restaurant with such a bewildered star.

Astounded, everyone peered down the street following his gaze, and soon spotted a man strolling closer and closer along the long street, a vegetable basket hanging on his left arm. This man was a marketplace monger; how could he have been the Chief Dongfang with resounding fame - Dong Fang Invincible? By the time everybody remembered to turn back at You Xun, he had vanished from sight. By then, everyone finally realized that all had just been terribly fooled. Madam Zhang, Chou Songnian, and Priest Yu Ling all started pouring out streams of abuses, knowing well that with his outstanding Qing-Gong skills and crafty mind, there would be no way to catch him back once he had run off.

"I see! Turned out it is You Xun who has the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript.' I didn't expect that at all!"

Linghu Chong said loudly.

“Really? Is it really in You Xun’s hands?” everyone asked in shock.

“Of course it’s in his hands. What else? Otherwise, why would he never speak out the whereabouts of the sword art manuscript, and try so hard to run away?” Linghu Chong elaborated. He spoke these words in a very loud voice, and after spitting out the last few words, he had almost used up all his strength.

“Young Master Linghu, why have you shifted the blame on me?” You Xun’s voice suddenly rose from outside the door, loud and clear. And only seconds later, he had already walked back in.

Madam Zhang and the rest of the group were filled with joy. Wasting no time, they quickly surrounded You Xun in a circle, once again.

“You just fell for Young Master Linghu’s stratagem!” Priest Yu Ling said, a big grin blossoming on his face.

“Alas, do I have any choice? If this piece of news had gotten out into the Martial World, saying that You Xun were the one who had the ‘Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,’ do you think I’d have another day of peace in the rest of my life? I wonder how many people would be after me and give me trouble. Even if I had three heads and six arms,<sup>51</sup> I’d still be no match for that kind of trouble. Young Master Linghu, you are good! Just a few words of yours are powerful enough to capture the Slippery and Hard to Grip.” You Xun pulled a long face.

Letting out a wry smile, Linghu Chong thought to himself, “It’s not that I am good. It’s only that I had been wronged just like that, before.”

He couldn’t help but cast a glance at Yue Lingshan, and Yue Lingshan just happened to be casting a glance at him, as well. When their eyes clapped, both blushed, and turned their heads away quickly.



"Brother You, when you left a moment ago, were you hiding the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' somewhere else so we won't be able to find it?" Madam Zhang mocked.

"That's too bitter!" You Xun protested. "Madam Zhang, if you speak like this, you are going to cost me my old life. Please think about it, all of you. If I have had the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' I undoubtedly should be using a sword, and my sword skills should have been outstanding. Then, why firstly, I don't even have a sword with me; secondly, I don't fight with a sword; and thirdly, my Kung Fu skills are extremely ordinary?"

When everyone pondered over his words, all had to agree that he did sound reasonable.

"Well, maybe you never had time to study the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' after you obtained it. Maybe you tried to learn it but failed miserably. You don't have a sword with you. Maybe somebody stole it," Root Fairy speculated.

"Isn't that folding fan in your hand a short sword? When you pointed it that way just a moment ago, didn't you use a move from the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript'?" Trunk Fairy exclaimed.

"That's right! Look at him. His fan is pointing at an angle right this moment. That's the fifty-ninth move of the Evil-Resisting Sword Art, 'Pointing At Crafty and Evil.' Whoever he points his sword to, whom he will kill." Branch Fairy also joined in.

At the time, the folding fan in You Xun's hand happened to be pointing toward Chou Songnian. The impetuous monk let out a thunderous roar and swung his two machetes at You Xun at once.

"Hey! Hey! He is only joking! Don't take him seriously!" You Xun shouted hastily, dodging to the side.

Four clanking sounds echoed as Chou Songnian chopped twice with each of his machetes and You Xun blocked all of them with his folding fan. Apparently, his folding fan was made of steel. Although You Xun looked like a lord in clover,

chubby with light skin tones, his movement was surprisingly agile. And only a gentle prod with his folding fan had sent the Tiger-Head Machetes swaying several feet away. One could well perceive that his Kung Fu skills had to be superior to the longhaired mendicant monk. It was only because he was in the middle of a tight encirclement that he dared not to launch his counter attack.

"This move is the thirty-second move, 'Hard-shelled Tortoise Breaking Wind.' Hmm, this move blocked a chop. It is the twenty-fifth move, called 'Soft-shelled Tortoise Turning Over'," Flower Fairy shouted along.

"Mr. You, if the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript' is really not in your possession, then who has it?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Yeah! Speak up! Who has it?" Madam Zhang, Priest Yu Ling and the rest people all asked anxiously.

"The only reason I am keeping this to myself is to be able to make a few thousand taels of silver," You Xun squeezed out a grin. "But since you are so stingy and have made up your mind to save money, fine, I'll tell you. But don't say that I didn't warn you. Once you hear about it, you'll only be able to itch in your heart and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. If it were somebody else who had laid his hands on the 'Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript,' at least you'd still have some hope. But it is so unfortunate that it had to be this one who has it in his possession, there's...there's...well, well..."

Everybody held his breath and listened on anxiously for You Xun to tell the name of the person, who had the sword art manuscript in his possession. Suddenly, sounds of hoof beats mixed up with sounds of horse-drawn wagons broke out on the street and came closer and closer. You Xun seized the opportunity and stopped telling. Turning his head sideways, he listened, and then asked, "Err, who's that?"

"Speak it out! Who has the sword art manuscript?" Priest Yu Ling pressed on.

"There's no need to be impatient. Of course I'll tell you," You Xun replied.

The sounds of hoof beats and wagons stopped abruptly outside the small restaurant. "Is Young Master Linghu here? Our faction has prepared horses and wagons to greet your gracious presence," an aged voice announced.

Linghu Chong was anxious to find out the whereabouts of the "Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript," thus, prove his innocence and remove the suspicions from Master, Master-Wife, fellow apprentices and little apprentice sister. Therefore, he didn't reply to the call from the outside and urged You Xun again, "There are other people coming. Hurry up, tell us!"

"I beg your pardon, Young Master. Just because other people are coming, it wouldn't be a good idea to tell now," You Xun replied.

Sound of more hoof beats rose from the distance, and soon another seven or eight riders arrived and stopped right in front of the restaurant.

"Chief Huang, are you here to greet Young Master Linghu?" a gallant voice asked.

"Yes, I am. What have brought Chieftain Sima here today?" the old man replied.

The man with the gallant voice snorted, and soon heavy footsteps echoed as a giant man entered the restaurant in big strides.

"Which of you is Young Master Linghu? I am Sima Big. I've come to greet Young Master and bring him to Five-Tyrant Ridge to meet the many heroes," he announced loudly.

Having no alternatives, Linghu Chong cupped his hands in greeting. "I am Linghu Chong. I certainly do not deserve such gracious amenity from Chieftain Sima."

"Because I've always been big and tall since I was only a kid, my parents named me Sima Big. Young Master Linghu, you can call me Sima Big, or just Biggy. Don't call me

Chieftain. I don't deserve it in front of you," Chieftain Sima exclaimed.

"You flatter me," Linghu Chong replied. Pointing at Yue Buqun and Madam Yue, he introduced, "These are my Master and my Master-Wife."

"Hello there!" Sima Big cupped his hands and greeted. Turning back toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Young Master, I apologize for not having greeted you earlier. Will you please pardon me?"

Yue Buqun had held the Head Master post of the Huashan Sword School for over twenty years and had always been well respected by people in the Martial World. But people like this Sima Big, Madam Zhang, Chou Songnian, Priest Yu Ling, or the rest of the bunch, who showed great respect to Linghu Chong, all had very little concern about the Head Master of the Huashan Sword School. Even if they did show him a little bit of respect, occasionally, it was all for the sake of Linghu Chong, and they didn't even try to hide that. To Yue Buqun, this was even worse than cursing him to his face, and he was exasperated. But Yue Buqun was a very civilized man, and didn't show any of his irritation on his face.

By then, the chief named Huang had also entered the room. He was well over eighty years of age. The bush of completely grey beard under his chin almost reached his chest, but he looked hale and hearty. Bowing slightly toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Young Master Linghu, the many brothers in our faction make our living right around this region. We've failed terribly to put up a good reception for you. Even death cannot atone our offense."

"Could this have been him?" Yue Buqun felt a big shock in his heart. He had known for a long time that there was a faction named "Heavenly River Faction" around the lower reaches of the Yellow River, and the chief, Huang Boliu, was a very senior master in the Martial World. But the faction lacked strict rules and regulations, and among the many members, the good and bad were intermingled. It was simply

unavoidable to have members violate laws and commit crimes. Therefore, the reputation of the "Heavenly River Faction" was not that great. However, the many hands provided great strength, and the faction did not lack first class fighters. It was a very large faction in the region of four provinces. Could this old man in front of him have been the "Silver-Bearded Dragon," Huang Boliu, who commanded over ten thousand faction members? If this were him, indeed, then why had he shown such great respect toward Linghu Chong, a young lad who was only at the beginning of his career?

The doubts and suspicions that boggled Yue Buqun's mind didn't last very long, when the Double-Snake Ruthless Beggar Yan Sanxing spoke to the old man.

"Hi, Silver-Bearded Old Dragon, you are the local bully. Aren't you going to welcome us, the bunch of visitors?"

The grey-bearded old man was indeed the "Silver-Bearded Dragon" Huang Boliu. "We'll have to thank Young Master Linghu," he said, smiling. "If it weren't for his sake, how could I ever have so many masters and heroes spare their gracious presence. Now that you are all here, you are all noble guests of the 'Heavenly River Faction.' Of course we welcome you. Our faction has prepared a big feast on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge. May I ask Young Master Linghu and the rest of the friends here to set out and head over there?"

The small restaurant had become so crowded by now. Linghu Chong knew that You Xun would never speak out the secret in such a completely packed and noisy place. Luckily, after this incident with You Xun, the suspicions Master, Master-Wife, and all the fellow apprentices had should have been greatly diminished. He was sure that the whole thing would, one day, come to obvious. Having that in mind, he was no longer in an urgent rush to clear himself of the blame.

"Master, should we go or not? Will you please direct us," turning to Yue Buqun, he asked.

Yue Buqun thought to himself, "It's apparent that among the bunch of people gathering on top of the Five-Tyrant

Ridge, there isn't going to be a single one from the orthodox schools. How can I mix myself up with them? It almost seems that these people are tempting Chong to join them using courtesy and respect. The incident with Liu Zhengfeng of the Hengshan Sword School had set a good example. If one becomes close with evil people, then he cannot escape the fate of being utterly discredited, himself. But under the current circumstance, how could I say no?"

"Mr. Yue, the Five-Tyrant Ridge is bustling with people and activities at the moment! Many chiefs of different caves and islands haven't made an appearance in the Martial World for ten, twenty, or even thirty years. Everyone came for the sake of Young Master Linghu, and it is you, Mr. Yue, who have shaped him into such a wonderful young hero of both civil and military ability. You have brought great glory to yourself for accomplishing such a great feat. Of course you'd want to go to the Five-Tyrant Ridge. If Mr. Yue doesn't go, wouldn't that disappoint a lot of people?"

Before Yue Buqun even had a chance to answer, half supporting and half carrying, Sima Big and Huang Boliu had ushered Linghu Chong out of the restaurant door and into one of the horse-drawn wagons. Chou Songnian, Yan Sanxing, the Tung Cypress Whiz Duo, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, and the rest of the bunch also rushed out of the door in a hubbub.

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue stared at each other and both squeezed a wry smile. "These people only wanted to make sure that Chong would go there. Whether we are going or not, they didn't care at all," they thought.

"Dad! Why don't we go and have a look? Let's find out what kind of tricks these weird people are playing with big apprentice brother," Yue Lingshan proposed, her curiosity growing by the minute. For a while, she remembered the human-flesh-eating Black Bear and White Bear, and her heart hammered frantically. Figuring that if they were able to set her free for big apprentice brother's sake, then logically,

they shouldn't be coming back to chew on her fingers, she relaxed a little. But she still made up her mind that after they arrived at the Five-Tyrant Ridge, she would make sure to keep a close distance with her father.

Yue Buqun nodded his approval and then walked out of the door. After the miserable vomiting experience, he didn't eat or drink anything, and now when he walked about, it almost felt as if he was slightly disoriented and could not stand in a solid stance. A quick check with his inner energy confirmed that the inner energy he was able to gather was not as pure as it used to be, and Yue Buqun couldn't help feeling stunned.

"The poison from Blue Phoenix of the Five-Sylph Sect is truly powerful," he muttered to himself.

The group with Huang Boliu and the group with Sima Big both came with many horses, so they were able to spare some horses for Yue Buqun, Madam Yue, Madam Zhang, Chou Songnian, the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, and the rest of the bunch to ride. Some male apprentices of the Huashan Sword School didn't have any horse left for ride, and had to walk together with members of the "Heavenly River Faction" and subordinates of the Chieftain Sima Big of the Long-Whale Island. Everything ready and set, they set out toward the Five-Tyrant Ridge.

# **Chapter 17: In Love**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**Half of the girl's face could be seen from the reflection in the water. Her eyes were shut tight. Long eyelashes swayed in the wind. She was a gorgeous-looking girl seventeen or eighteen years of age.**

The Five-Tyrant Ridge lay right at where the Shandong Province and the Henan Province bordered each other, west to Heze and Dingtao in the Shandong Province, and east to Dongming of the Henan Province. The terrains around the region were mostly made up of flat lands with swamp country. From a distance, the Five-Tyrant Ridge didn't appear to be a tall mountain but rather just a small hill. The group of horse riders and wagons galloped toward the east and after every few miles or so, there would always be several riders coming from the east to greet them. Dismounting from their horses right next to the wagon, they would shout their greetings to Linghu Chong with raised voices, acting very respectfully with great courtesy.

The closer they were from the Five-Tyrant Ridge, the more people greeted them alongside the road. Although every one of them gave a brief self-introduction of himself, Linghu Chong could not remember the great amount of information. Finally, the horse-drawn wagon stopped in front of a tall ridge. The ridge of hill was covered by a dense mass of pine trees, and a mountain road zigzagged upward, leading to the top.

Huang Boliu helped Linghu Chong out of the horse-drawn wagon to the side of the road, where two big fellows carrying a bamboo carriage had been waiting. Thinking that Master, Master-Wife and little apprentice sister would have to climb up the ridge on foot while he took the carriage, Linghu Chong felt uneasiness brewing inside him.

"Master-Wife, why don't you take the wagon? I can walk by myself," he suggested.

"The Young Master Linghu is the one they are greeting, not your Master-Wife," Madam Yue replied with a grin before

striding up the mountain road, followed by Yue Buqun and their daughter, Yue Lingshan.

Having no other alternatives, Linghu Chong sat down in the bamboo carriage chair. The two carriers lifted the carriage and soon entered a large clearing in the middle of the woods on top of the hill, where patches of crowds had scattered about all over it. Judging from the looks and expressions of these people, Linghu Chong knew that these were all the kind of rough fellows from the unorthodox factions of the Martial World. At the sight of Linghu Chong's arrival, the crowd rushed forward like a swarm of bees.

"Is this the Young Master Linghu?" many asked eagerly.

"Here are some panaceas passed down from my ancestors that can return the dead to life," a man shouted.

"I dug this matured, human-shaped ginseng<sup>52</sup> out in Mount Changbai twenty years ago. Young Master Linghu, will you please have it!" another one offered.

"These seven men are the most skilled and renowned doctors in the eastern Shandong Province. I've invited them here to check on Young Master Linghu's pulse," a third person announced.

All seven doctors were tied up tightly around their wrists, and a rope strung them all together. Looking wan and sallow, each of them showed a gloomy face, none had any trace of superiority, the kind normally displayed on the face of a renowned doctor, left in him. Obviously the man had kidnapped them all, and the word "invitation" was far from the truth.

"I've taken a little bit of every kind of precious medicine in the entire Jinan City, so if Young Master Linghu needs anything specific, we won't be unprepared," carrying two large bamboo basket on his shoulders, a man declared.

Most of the people in the crowd are rough and coarse fellows, and many dressed in strange and unusual outfits, but Linghu Chong had no doubt about their sincerity and was utterly grateful. Having suffered many setbacks just lately

and having been living on the brink of death for the last many days, Linghu Chong found himself much more emotional. At the sight of the many caring faces, a warm feeling swelled in his heart, and soon big drops of tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Dear friends, Linghu Chong is only a nobody in this world, yet the many of you...have shown me great care and concern...I really don’t know...don’t know how I’ll ever be able to repay your kindness....” cupping his hands in greetings, Linghu Chong spoke, but only after a few sentences, he choked with sobs. Not able to express his gratitude with words, he knelt down and bowed his head to solute, which immediately caused uproar in the crowd.

“We certainly don’t deserve such high honor!” “Please, please stand up!” “You are really embarrassing us now.” Amid the many scattered replies, people in the crowd also knelt down on their knees and saluted back. Within moments, except Yue Buqun, the group of Huashan apprentices, and the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies, the over one thousand people atop the Five-Tyrant Ridge were all on their knees. Didn’t want to give the misimpression of taking the salute from the many people, Yue Buqun and the rest of the Huashan members turned sideways and took a few steps back, while the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies pointed their fingers at the crowd in total amusement, spilling streams of drivels and laughing their heads off.

After several bows, Linghu Chong stood back up, tears streaming out from his eyes. “Regardless of what intention these friends have, I am willing to risk any danger for their sake, even if I’ll have my body smashed into pieces,” he thought to himself.

“Young Master Linghu, this way please. You can take a rest at the shack over there,” Chief Huang Boliu of the Heavenly River Faction proposed and then ushered Linghu Chong and the Yue Buqun couple into a shack.

The shack was made of straws and appeared to have just being built very recently. A table and a few chairs occupied the middle of the shack, and a teakettle and a set of teacups sat on top of the table. Huang Boliu waved his hand, and immediately, his subordinates brought in wine and poured a cup for each of them. More people walked in and brought plates of beef jerky, ham, and the kind of snacks that goes well with wine. Linghu Chong picked up the cup in front of him and then walked out of the shack.

"Dear friends," he spoke out loud, "this is the first time I've met many of you, so naturally we need a toast for the new friendship. From now on, you are all good friends of Linghu Chong. Starting from today, we'll share joy and sorrow, weal and woe. Let all of us, all good friends here, start by sharing this cup of wine first!" At that word, he swung his right arm and poured the wine in the cup toward the sky, which immediately separated into thousands of small drops and splashed everywhere.

"Young Master Linghu said it right! Starting from today, we'll share joy and sorrow, weal and woe, with you!" cheers resounded like rolls of thunder as the crowd replied in unison.

Yue Buqun knitted his brows as he thought to himself, "Chong is behaving so rashly and unruly, having no concern about the consequences of his action. When he saw that these people cared for him, he didn't even think before saying that he would share joy and sorrow, weal and woe with them. Among these people here, most likely not even a single one of them is a law-abiding citizen, and many might have easily fallen into the same league as the notorious Tian Boguang. When they raid homes and plunder houses, rape and loot, are you going to share the joy? When we, people of the orthodox schools, exterminate these hoodlums, are you going to share the sorrow?"

"Why all the friends here, today, are caring so much for me, Linghu Chong, I have no clue," Linghu Chong went on. "But whether I know, or don't know, that doesn't matter.

Whatever the puzzlement is, you can tell it to my face. A true man is as open as the day, and always speaks out his mind. If there's anything Linghu Chong can do for you, even if I have to climb a hill of knives or go through a forest of swords, I dare not to decline."

He had thought that these people didn't even know each other before, yet all tried very hard to befriend him, then naturally they must have something very important that needed his help. Since he was going to give his word anyhow, even if that was something he was incapable of doing, so what? He was going to die very soon anyway.

"Where did you get that idea, Young Master Linghu," Huang Boliu answered. "The many friends here heard that Young Master was coming, and out of admiration and respect, all of us just happen to coincide and gathered here, so we can have a look at your elegant demeanor with reverence. We also heard that Young Master was not feeling well, that's why some of us invited renowned doctors, and some others gathered different kinds of medicine. We definitely have no request of any kind for Young Master. We are not from the same group. Many of us have only heard about each other before, and some didn't even get along. But since Young Master have said that we should share joy and sorrow, weal and woe, starting from today, even if we weren't good friends before among ourselves, we are good friends now."

"Naturally! Chief Huang said it perfectly," the crowd replied all together.

"Young Master, why don't you go back in the shack and have these seven renowned doctors check out your pulse?" the man who pulled a string of doctors behind him stepped forward and suggested.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "Even Doctor Ping One-Finger, such an extraordinary doctor has concluded that there's no cure for my injuries, what else could the seven doctors of yours find?" But for fear of hurting the man's good intension, he could not object, and had to step back inside

the shack. The man dragged the seven doctors into the shack as if they were a string of frogs, which brought a grin on Linghu Chong's face.

"This brother, why don't you set them free. I am sure they won't be able to run away," Linghu Chong proposed.

"If Young Master says so," the man answered, and soon broke the rope into pieces with six popping sounds. "If you can't cure Young Master Linghu, I'll break your necks the same way," he yelled at the doctors.

"I...I'll try my best. But there's...there's no doctor who can always guarantee a cure," one of the doctors muttered.

"Young Master here is glowing with health and radiating vigor. I am sure his illness can be easily rid off with a dose of medicament," another doctor added immediately as all of them rushed forward to check Linghu Chong's pulse.

Suddenly someone shouted at the shack's doorway, "Get out of here, all of you! You useless quacks!"

Linghu Chong turned his head around and immediately spotted "Killer Doctor" Ping One-Finger.

"Doctor Ping, you've come too. I thought none of these doctors would have been of any use," he said happily.

Ping One-Finger entered the shack. Raising his left foot, he suddenly threw a kick at one of the doctors. Bang! The doctor flew out of the shack. Without any delay, he raised his right foot. With another loud bang, a second doctor was kicked out of the shack.

The man who had brought all the doctors along seemed to have quite an awe against Ping One-Finger. Turning toward the group of doctors, he yelled loudly.

"Doctor Ping, the number one doctor in the world, has arrived. How dare you show yourselves up in front of him?"

Another two loud bangs rose as the man also kicked two of the doctors out of the shack. Terrified, the rest three doctors staggered out of the shack. The man bowed timidly with a smiling face, obviously trying to please Ping One-Finger.

“Young Master Linghu, Doctor Ping, I wasn’t thinking right. Will you please pardon...?” he said, when suddenly, Ping One-Finger raised his left foot, and with another loud bang, sending the man flying out of the shack.

Linghu Chong was astounded, having not expected such a result at all. Without saying another word, Ping One-Finger took a seat next to Linghu Chong and placed his fingers on Linghu Chong’s right wrist to check his pulse. After a good while, he switched to Linghu Chong’s left wrist and began checking this one instead. After another good while, he switched back to Linghu Chong’s right wrist once again. Thus, switching back and forth, he checked Linghu Chong’s pulse again and again. Knitting his brows almost into a straight line, he pondered with all his might, his eyes shut tightly.

“Doctor Ping!” Linghu Chong finally broke the silence. “Life and death lie in the lap of fate. My injury is just too severe to cure. It has already troubled you twice, and I simply can’t be thankful enough for your kindness. There is really no need to trouble you any further.”

Loud noise and excitement rose from the outside, soon followed by the sounds of people playing wine games on top of their tongues – apparently people from the “Heavenly River Faction” had brought in shipments of food and wine to supply the crowd. Linghu Chong’s mind seemed to have slipped out from the shack so he could join the crowd outside to have a jolly time, but Ping One-Finger switched back and forth with his two wrists, as though there was never going to be an end to it.

“Doctor Ping’s name is Ping One-Finger,” Linghu Chong thought to himself secretly, “and he always claimed that he only needed one finger to check one’s pulse for a cure and only one finger to seal one’s acupoint for a kill. But look how many fingers is he using on me now? If I am not mistaken, he is using all ten of them.”



A loud cracking sound suddenly interrupted his thought. A man stuck his head inside the shack, and it turned out to be the Trunk Fairy.

"Linghu Chong! Why aren't you drinking wine with us?" Trunk Fairy asked.

"I'll be right there. You'd better wait for me! Don't get yourself filled up too quickly," Linghu Chong answered.

"Sure!" Trunk Fairy replied. "Doctor Ping, you'd better hurry up!" At that word, he pulled his head out.

Slowly, Ping One-Finger drew his hands away from Linghu Chong's wrists. Eyes still shutting tight, he drummed his right index finger on the table gently as though greatly puzzled. Opening his eyes after a long while, he finally spoke.

"Young Master Linghu! There are seven types of energy streams inside your body, constantly crashing against each other. There is no passageway for them to exit out, and there's no hope to tame them either. This is neither a case of poison, nor a wound inflicted by a blade, much less illness caused by cold or fever, thus not something treatable with medicine or acupuncture."

"Right," Linghu Chong acknowledged.

"Since that day when I checked your pulse in the town of Zhuxian, I've already figured out a solution, which, with some luck, might work the wonder. I was going to gather seven martial arts masters, who have superb and resourceful inner energy, to work on you all at once, and eradicate the seven types of energy streams once for all. I've already invited three of them to come here today. It shouldn't be difficult to find two more qualified masters among the crowd. Then when you count your Master, Mr. Yue, and I in, everything would have been ready. But when I checked your pulse just now, I couldn't help noticing some dramatic changes in the situation, which completely complicated things to the extreme."

"Oh!" Linghu Chong responded.

“During the last several days, four dramatic changes had taken place. Change number one: Young Master took dozens of ultra-nutritious tonics, among which were precious medicaments such as ginseng, Polygonum multiflorum, Glossy Ganoderma, Tuckahoe, and the like. But the effects of these tonics were actually intended for female patients.”

“Wow!” Linghu Chong exclaimed. “You are absolutely right! That’s amazing! Such excellent skills had to be rare in all ages.”

“Why did Young Master take these tonics?” Ping One-Finger went on. “Most probably a quack was to blame. How detestable and irritating!”

“Zu Qianqiu thought he was doing me a favor when he stole Old Man’s ‘Life-Extending Eight Pills’ to feed me,” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “How could he have known that there are different tonics between male and female? If I spill the beans, for sure Doctor Ping would blame him. It’s probably better if I just keep this to myself.” At that thought, he said, “It’s my own fault. I can’t really blame anybody else.”

“You didn’t lack any energy. Quite on the contrary, you had too much energy in you. Now when you suddenly took so much of these tonics, you’ve worsened the case. Think about it. If the water in the Yangtze River has already risen to a dangerous height, what will happen if the water controller keeps directing even more water into it from the Dongting Lake and the Boyang Lake? A Disaster! These types of tonics would only have benefited congenitally deficient young females. Unfortunately Young Master took them. Alas! How Harmful!”

“I just hope Miss Old Not-Dead, the daughter of Old Man, will eventually recover after drinking my blood,” Linghu Chong thought.

“Change number two: Young Master, you have lost a great amount of blood all of a sudden. How could you have gotten yourself into fights and brawls so recklessly with your

already injured body? Scrambling for supremacy with fierce means in no way leads to a prolonged life. Alas, that one thought so highly of you, yet you have no regard for yourself. A true man can wait ten years before seeking his revenge; why couldn't you have waited a bit longer and had to seek the instant pleasure?" Ping One-Finger shook his head again and again as he spoke, a disapprobatory expression brewing on his face. If his patient weren't Linghu Chong, he would probably have smacked him hard on the face, or, at least, have poured out endless of invectives.

"You are absolutely right, senior master," Linghu Chong replied.

"If your losing much blood were the only problem we have to worry about, it would still have been manageable. But why did you mix yourself up with people from the Yunnan Five-Sylph Sect and drank their Five-Sylph Mega-Nourishing Wine?" Ping One-Finger's voice became more and more irritated.

"Five-Sylph Mega-Nourishing Wine?" Linghu Chong repeated in surprise.

"Yes, the Five-Sylph Mega-Nourishing Wine - brewed using the secret formula of the Five-Sylph Sect passed down generation after generation," Ping One-Finger murmured. The five venomous pests in the wine were extremely precious. It was said that each one takes decades to cultivate. There are also dozens kinds of rare plants in the wine, together with the five venomous pests, they produce a strange yet powerful balance. The drinker of this wine will be void of harm from all diseases and poisons, and also gain inner energy worth ten years of training. It is the most miraculous tonic existing in the world. I've yearned for a chance to see it for many years. I heard that Blue Phoenix the girl always maintains a good moral integrity and never even looks encouragingly to any man. Who would have expected that she would give you the most precious medicated wine of her sect? Alas, the loose youth, stealing young girls' hearts

wherever he goes, ignorant of the harm this has brought upon himself!"

Linghu Chong couldn't help but let out an embarrassed smile. "Chief Blue and I have only met once before. It was on our boat when we sailed east along the Yellow River. I am indebted to her for presenting me the Five-Sylph Wine. But other than that, we had no association whatsoever," he explained.

After gazing at him for a good while, Ping One-Finger nodded.

"In that case, I suppose it was only for the sake of that one, did Blue Phoenix give you the Five-Sylph Mega-Nourishing Wine. But the extra nourishment only resulted in more energy inside you, which, in turn, caused more damage. Besides, even though the wine is mega-nourishing, it is mega-poisonous, also. Damn! What a big mess this is! All they have at the Five-Sylph Sect are a few odd prescriptions passed down from past generations. What stinking nonsense medical principles did Blue Phoenix the little chick understand? What a god damned big mess this is in!" Ping One-Finger went frantic.

Linghu Chong listened on as Ping One-Finger poured out streams of profanities. "He's certainly gotten an unusually hot temper," he couldn't help thinking. But then as soon as he noticed Ping One-Finger's gloomy face and the fluctuating chest below, obviously from the sincere caring for his well being, he regretted it.

"Senior master Ping, Chief Blue only had good intentions...." he said.

"Good intentions! Good intentions! Humph! When the many quacks misdiagnosed their patients and got them killed, which one of them didn't have good intentions? You tell me! Did you know that people die everyday because of misdiagnoses from quacks are far more than people who die from a blade in the Martial World?" Ping One-Finger snarled.

"There's a good possibility that might happen," Linghu Chong replied.

"What possibility? That's the fact," Ping One-Finger bellowed. "What makes Blue Phoenix think that she can just stick her nose in this? Who the hell does she think she is, messing with my patient? At the moment, your blood contains severe poisons. If I attempt to neutralize them one by one, they would clash violently with the seven types of energy streams inside you, and you wouldn't even last three hours."

"Those severe poisons in my blood probably have nothing to do with the Five-Sylph Wine I drank," Linghu Chong couldn't help but think. "Chief Blue and those four Miao girls used their own blood when they gave blood to me. They live and deal with poisonous pests day and night, even their food has poisonous element, then naturally their blood must have contained various poisons. Only that they've grown accustomed to that, and the various poisons could no longer affect their bodies. I'd better not mention a word about this, or else, he might lose his temper completely." At that thought, he said, "Medical principles and pharmacology are subtle and abstruse subjects. It's only naturally that a common person won't be able to understand them thoroughly."

Ping One-Finger heaved a sigh and then went on. "If taking the tonics by mistake, losing a great deal of blood, and drinking the medicinal wine were all the problems there are, I can still manage to overcome. But the fourth dramatic change has really left me at a loss as to what to do. Alas, you've only have yourself to blame for that!"

"Yes, I have only myself to blame," Linghu Chong echoed.

"In the last several days, why have you suddenly become so downhearted and completely lost the will to live? What happened? What caused the grievance? Last time when I checked your pulse at the town of Zhuxian, even though you were severely injured, I could still feel the vigorous flow in

your heart arteries with thriving vitality. That was when I decided to extend your life for another one hundred days, so I could try my best to find a way to cure your bizarre injury within the one hundred days. At that time, I was not one hundred percent certain about the solution, and didn't have the need to explain everything to you. But why have you completely lost the thriving vitality?"

At that question, a strong feeling of sorrow instantly swelled up in Linghu Chong's heart as he thought to himself, "Before, when Master had suspected me of embezzling Little Lin's Evil-Resisting Sword Manuscript, it was still alright. With a clear conscience, I felt no qualms. Eventually doubts will clear up when facts are known. But...but even little apprentice sister began suspecting me, and thought of me as a worthless thief deep in her heart for the sake of Little Lin. That snuffed the last bit of life out of me. There would be no joy for me to continue living in this world."

But Ping One-Finger did not wait for him to answer and spoke again. "Your pulse is telling me that this, again, has something to do with the remorse of love. Can't you see that all women in the world have a detestable face and a dull tongue? It would be best if you can keep your distance from them. Only when you fail at avoiding them should you tolerate with utmost effort and deal with them courteously but without sincerity. Why are you so muddleheaded and longing for them day and night, instead? That's so very much wrong! Although, although that one...alas, I don't know what I should say about that!" At that word, he shook his head wearily.

"Your wife certainly has a detestable face and a dull tongue," Linghu Chong thought, "but it's not necessary that women in the world are all like that. It's so funny that you are using your own wife to generalize all women in the world. If little apprentice sister were to have a detestable face and a dull tongue..."

His thoughts were interrupted when Flower Fairy suddenly showed up at the entrance of the shack, each hand holding a large bowl filled with wine.

"Hey, Doctor Ping! Have you cured him yet?" Flower Fairy asked.

"He is incurable!" Ping One-Finger grunted, pulling a long face.

"Incurable?" Flower Fairy was taken by surprise. "Whacha gonna do then?" Turning toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Why don't you come out and drink with us then."

"Sure!" Linghu Chong replied.

"No, you won't! You stay here!" Ping One-Finger bellowed in a croaked voice.

That gave Flower Fairy a good fright. Turning on his wheels, he left in a hurry, splashing the bowls of wine all over himself.

"Young Master Linghu," Ping One-Finger spoke again, this time in a much calmer voice. "Even God himself would probably have a real hard time healing you completely. It is still possible to extend your life for several more months or even several more years, though. But you must listen to my advice. Firstly, you must abstain from wine. Secondly, you must stop being fanciful and fickle. Stay away from all women. You can't even fancy any woman, period. Thirdly, you must not get into fights with others. If you successfully abstain yourself from wine, women, and fights, then you can probably live a few years longer."

Linghu Chong suddenly broke into a loud laughter.

"What's so funny," Ping One-Finger snarled.

"When a man lives his life, he has got to enjoy himself carefree. If he couldn't even drink wine, fancy women, or defend himself when bullied, what good is he? He'd rather die before it's too late, to end it quickly."

"I demand you to abstain yourself. If I can't cure you, my reputation will be completely ruined," Ping One-Finger snapped.

Reaching out with his left hand, Linghu Chong held onto the back of Ping One-Finger's right hand. "Senior master Ping, I am utterly grateful for your great kindness. But life and death lie in the lap of fate. Even with your most excellent skills, it is still no use to try to cure someone destined to die. Not being able to cure my injury will not affect senior master's reputation in the least."

Crack! Another man stuck his head inside the shack, and it was Root Fairy this time. "Linghu Chong, are you all cured?" he shouted.

"Doctor Ping's skills are miraculous! He has already cured me," Linghu Chong answered.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Root Fairy cried. Rushing into the shack and grabbing Linghu Chong by his sleeves, he pulled. "Let's go drink! Let's go drink!"

"Senior master, many thanks!" Linghu Chong bowed deeply toward Ping One-Finger, who totally ignored Linghu Chong and only murmured indistinguishable to himself.

"I knew he'd be able to cure you. He is the 'Killer Doctor', isn't he? Every time when he cures one, he has to kill on. If he can't cure one, what is he gonna do, then? Wouldn't that be troublesome?" Root Fairy grinned.

"Nonsense!" Linghu Chong also grinned, and hand in hand, the two of them walked out of the shack.

People in the clearing had all been drinking merrily in clusters for a good while by now. When Linghu Chong walked among them, they kept presenting more and more wine to him, and to everybody's greatest satisfaction, Linghu Chong would pour it straight down his throat every time. Seeing how Linghu Chong laughed and joked together with them at ease and kept drinking to the limit of his capacity, everybody was overjoyed. "Young Master Linghu's heroic spirit shines above the ninth heaven! We are filled with heartfelt admiration," they all said.

After drinking over a dozen bowls of wine in succession, Linghu Chong remembered Ping One-Finger. Filling a bowl



with wine and singing "Enjoy the wine today while you still can" loudly, he walked back into the shack.

"Senior master Ping, I propose a toast for you!" he said, but what he saw startled him, and the shock instantly sobered him up.

Under the fluttering candlelight, Ping One-Finger's face appeared to have gone through dramatic changes. A more careful glance soon revealed the differences. The entirely dark hair on his head just moments ago had turned completely gray, and his once smooth and silky face now had deep wrinkles all over it. Within the mere half-an-hour, Ping One-Finger seemed to have aged twenty years. Huddled up by the corner of the table, he was still murmuring to himself.

"When I cure one, I have to kill one. When I can't cure one, what do I do, then?"

"Linghu Chong's life does not really worth much. Senior master, why can't you just let it go?" Burning with the utmost gratitude, Linghu Chong exclaimed loudly.

"If I can't cure one, I'll just have to kill myself, to suit the name 'Killer Doctor'," Ping One-Finger murmured. He stood up all of a sudden, and after swaying slightly a few times, he spat out a mouthful of blood and then collapsed to the ground.

Astounded, Linghu Chong ran forward and propped Doctor Ping's head in his arms, only to find that Ping One-Finger had stopped breathing. Carrying the body in his arms, Linghu Chong stood up slowly, sorrow welling up in his chest. Gradually, the noises of drinking and partying outside died away as silence slowly swept across, and the feeling of loneliness and desolation soon filled his heart. He just stood there quietly as drops of tears rolled down his cheeks and fell to his feet. Ping One-Finger's body seemed to have become heavier and heavier; feeling completely exhausted, he no longer had enough strength to carry it, and had to put it back down to the ground gently.

"Young Master Linghu!" a man walked into the shack quietly and called out in a whisper.

With a quick glance, Linghu Chong recognized him immediately. It was Zu Qianqiu.

"Senior master Zu! Doctor Ping has just passed away," he murmured in a mournful voice. But Zu Qianqiu didn't seem to care much about it, and only whispered to him again.

"Young Master Linghu, I've come to ask you for a favor. If anyone asks you about me, would you mind saying that you've never met Zu Qianqiu before?"

"Why's that?" Quite taken aback, Linghu Chong asked.

"It's really nothing. Only that...only that...er...I'll see you," Zu Qianqiu replied.

As soon as Zu Qianqiu walked out of the shack, another man entered. It was Sima Big this time.

"Young Master Linghu, I have this really embarrassing... er...embarrassing favor...well...if anyone asks you who have gathered on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge, would you please don't mention my name? I'd really, really appreciate that."

"Sure, but what for?" Linghu Chong replied.

Sima Big's face suddenly turned bashful, as if he were a kid who had just been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "That...er...that..." he murmured haltingly.

"If Linghu Chong is not worthy to be your friend, I certainly dare not to claim kinship," Linghu Chong said coldly.

At those words, Sima Big's face turned scarlet, and in the next minute, he was already on his knees, bowing down deeply.

"Young Master Linghu, that's not how I feel at all. I was only asking you to not mention about my coming to the Five-Tyrant Ridge so I don't make someone angry. If Young Master is still doubtful, then just forget about what I said. I was just breaking wind."

"You are been too courteous," Linghu Chong prodded Sima Big up and said hurriedly. "May I ask you a question,

Chieftain? Why is it that your coming to the Five-Tyrant Ridge to see me would make someone angry? If this someone detests Linghu Chong so utterly, he can feel free to come after me, and me only....”

Sima Big shoot his hands disapprovingly at once. “What are you talking about, Young Master?” He grinned. “This someone couldn’t have been more fond of you. Why would there be any ill feelings? Alas, I am so crude, putting my foot in my mouth again. Goodbye, Young Master. Well, in a word, Sima Big likes you very much! If there’s anything you ever need me for, anything at all, just give me a howl, and even if I have to step through water or fire to get there, I’ll be there. If I even show a slight frown, I am a stinking, rotten tortoise egg!” He gave a hard smack to his own chest and then strode out of the shack, leaving a very confused Linghu Chong inside, alone.

“It’s unquestionable that he was all sincere about what he said to me,” Linghu Chong thought to himself, “but why is it that his coming to the Five-Tyrant Ridge would make someone angry? Yet, the one who is angry about it not only has no ill feelings about me, but also cared for me very much. This is really weird! If that someone is truly fond of me, he should have been very pleased that I’ve made so many friends.” Suddenly an idea came upon him. “Oh, I got it. This someone must have been a senior master from an orthodox school, that’s why he was very fond of me, yet did not want me to befriend people from the unorthodox sects. Could he be Grand Uncle-Master Feng? But people like that Chieftain Sima are simple and frank. What’s wrong about making friends with them?”

“Young Master Linghu?” Someone cleared his throat and called out in a low voice.

“Chief Huang, come in please,” Linghu Chong replied, recognizing Huang Boliu’s voice.

“Young Master Linghu, several friends wanted me to take a message to you. They had to run in light of some urgent

matters that just suddenly arose and didn't have any time to spare for a proper farewell. They ask for your pardon," Huang Boliu said after entering the shack.

"That's no problem," Linghu Chong replied. And sure enough, the noises from outside had become barely auditable and most of the people probably have already left.

"Well," Huang Boliu continued hesitantly, "this time, we've really rushed our fences. First of all, everybody was a bit curious; and secondly, all just wanted to make up to the... Who would have thought...well, of course, a thin-skinned one naturally wouldn't want to make this widely known. But we are just a bunch of boors and none had a clue. Besides, Chief Blue is a Miao girl, that...."

Huang Boliu just kept uttering words that did not even hang together, and Linghu Chong found himself bewildered.

"Chief Huang, are you trying to ask me to not mention what happened here on the Five-Tyrant Ridge to anyone?" he finally asked.

"Well, others can deny it, but I am stuck. That's what you get for being the host. I simply have no choice but to admit that the Heavenly River Faction had entertained Young Master on the Five-Tyrant Ridge." Huang Boliu let out a few hollow laughs, looking very much embarrassed.

"It's not like that entertaining me with wine is a crime guilty beyond forgiveness. Be a true man, what's this denying nonsense?" Linghu Chong grunted.

"Young Master, it's not like that," Huang Boliu smiled apologetically. "Alas, I've always been a blockhead. If I had asked my daughter-in-law first, or even my granddaughter, we wouldn't have offended others and still haven't gotten a clue. Alas, I married my wife when I was seventeen years old. If it weren't because my wife was so short-lived and died young, I wouldn't have been so ignorant of a girl's concern."

"No wonder Master always says that these people are heterodox," Linghu Chong thought. "This man is so incoherent. Just to entertain me with wine, he had to talk to

his daughter-in-law and his granddaughter first, then he blames his wife for being too short-lived."

"Well, what's done is done. I guess there's only one way out of this. Young Master, would it be all right if you just say that you knew the Old Huang from before and we have been acquaintances for decades? Wait, that's not right. Would you please just say that our acquaintance can be traced back to eight or nine years back and that you started drinking and gambling with the Old Huang since you were fifteen or sixteen years old?" Huang Boliu continued.

"Didn't I gamble and drink with you the year I was six? How could you have forgotten? That's a total of twenty years of acquaintance," Linghu Chong grinned.

Huang Boliu was taken by surprise, but it didn't take him long to realize that Linghu Chong was just been sarcastic.

"That's of course great if Young Master will say so, but... but twenty years ago I was in the business of raiding homes and plundering houses, things one wouldn't be very proud of. How could Young Master have made fiends with me? Well... that...." Huang Boliu squeezed out a wry smile.

"Chief Huang, your frankness about it just shows that you are as open as the day. I simply must have made you a friends of mine twenty years ago!" Linghu Chong exclaimed.

"Excellent, excellent! Twenty-year long friends we are!" Huang Boliu was ecstatic. After throwing a quick glance back over his shoulder, he whispered, "Please take care, Young Master. You have a very kind heart. Even though you are not feeling well at the moment, I am sure your illness can be cured eventually. Besides, the Holy...Holy...is infinitely resourceful...ouch!" With a loud cry, he suddenly turned on his heels and walked off in big strides.

"What holy...holy...infinitely resourceful? This is so bizarre!" Linghu Chong couldn't help but think.

Sounds of hoof beats became further and further away, and in the end all the noises died down. After staring blankly at the corpse of Ping One-Finger for some moments, Linghu

Chong walked out of the shack and immediately found himself thunderstruck. The ridge was entirely deserted by now; there wasn't even a shadow anywhere, and all it was left was the utter silence that had swept across everything. He had thought that even though the many people had stopped drinking and some were leaving the ridge, they wouldn't have all left so abruptly.

"Master! Master-Wife!" he called out, raising his voice, but no one answered. "Second apprentice brother! Third apprentice brother! Little apprentice sister!" he called out again, but still no one answered. Other than the crescent moon shining sideways from a corner of the sky, he was the only one atop the spacious, yet breezeless Five-Tyrant Ridge.

Wine kettles, bowls, and plates scattered all over the ground, moreover, many kinds of hats, cloaks, and capes were littered everywhere. Apparently everyone had left so hastily that they didn't even have a spare moment to collect their belongings.

Feeling completely bewildered, Linghu Chong thought to himself, "They have left in such a hurry, as though some kind of great scourges were coming this way and they had to flee right away. When I first met them, these people all looked as though they feared nothing in this world at all. Why have they suddenly all turned timid? This is so bizarre! And where on earth have Master, Master-Wife, little apprentice sister and the others gone to? If danger is really coming this way, why didn't anyone warn me?"

Suddenly, a sensation of dreariness and loneliness rolled over him as he moaned at the thought that even though it was a big world he lived in, yet no one really cared about him or his safety. Just moments ago, there had been crowds of people who lined up to make up to him, but now, even the Master and Master-Wife, who had always been on intimate terms with him, had abandoned him, just the same.

A cold, plunging sensation in his stomach soared, which subsequently triggered the energy streams inside him to

suddenly surge up. He swayed, and then collapsed to the ground. A few groans escaped him as he struggled to get back onto his feet vainly, feeling completely feeble in all his limbs. Closing his eyes, he rested for a few moments, and then struggled again to try to get up, but this time he tried too hard – everything seemed to have suddenly faded into a complete darkness as a buzzing sound ringed loudly in his ears. Before he knew it, he had fallen unconscious.

Still in a state of wooziness and completely unaware of how long he had been out cold, Linghu Chong heard the soft strokes of a zither echoing in his ears indistinctly. Little by little, he regained his senses, and the elegant and soothing sounds of the zither play also became clearer and clearer, which put his mind at complete ease. The song was none other than the “Song of Peace and Serenity,” which the granny at Luoyang had played for him before. As soon as Linghu Chong recognized the music, he felt as though he had been drifting in the boundless ocean for days and had suddenly taken in the glimpse of an island in the near distance. Feeling utterly cheerful, he got back onto his feet.

The sound of the music seemed to have come from within the shack made of straws, so Linghu Chong staggered his way toward the shack. The shack door had been shut, and Linghu Chong stopped about six or seven paces from it, thinking, “The sound of the zither could only mean one thing – the granny from the Bamboo-Green Alley in the Luoyang City must have come. Even back in the Luoyang City, she didn’t want me to see her face, how could I just push open the door and enter without her permission?” At that thought, he said with a bow, “Linghu Chong is here to show his respects to the senior master.”

The zither made a few tinkling sounds, as though replying to Linghu Chong, and then resumed playing the song. Linghu Chong felt as though the song had carried much comforting and consoling meanings, which gave him ineffable ease. Realizing that after all, there was at least one

person who still cared for him, he found himself washed over by the sentiment of gratitude.

"Someone is playing the zither! Those heterodoxy, evil scoundrels haven't all left, yet," a voice suddenly rose from a distance.

"How dare these evil, lewd devils to come to Henan Province and act unruly? Are they stupid enough to think nothing of us?" a resonant voice replied, and after saying these word, he snarled, raising his voice even higher, "What kind of scumbags and slimeballs are you, huh, running wild on the Five-Tyrant Ridge? Give me your names, all of you!" With resourceful inner energy, these words exploded like thunders.

"No wonder Sima Big, Huang Boliu, Zu Qianqiu and the others were scared off at once. There are really master hands from the orthodox schools coming to challenge them," Linghu Chong thought. But deep in his heart, he couldn't help thinking that running away like this was not something a true man would have done. "But if the people coming could have scared away so many people, they had to be senior masters with extraordinary martial arts skills. What if they ask me about it? How would I answer? It's probably better if I don't let them see me."

At that thought, he walked hurriedly behind the shack.

"And in regard of the old granny inside the shack, they probably won't trouble her," he thought to himself.

By then, the zither inside the shack had stopped playing. Sounds of footsteps rose as three men walked onto the ridge. As soon as they arrived at the top of the ridge, all three uttered a cry of surprise. Obviously none of them had expected to see such a silent and empty scene atop the ridge.

"Where did the scoundrels go?" the man with the thunderous voice asked.

"Obviously, after hearing that the two master hands from the Shaolin School were coming to rid evil, they had all fled,



tails between their hind legs,” a man in a soft voice answered.

“Don’t mention it! I say mostly it had something to do with the prestige of brother Tan of the Kunlun School,<sup>53</sup>” another man said with a big smile, and all three broke into loud laughter.

“I see. So two of them are from the Shaolin School, and the third one is from the Kunlun School,” Linghu Chong thought. “The Shaolin School has always been the most reputable school in the Martial World even since the early Tang Dynasty. Just the Shaolin School alone already enjoys a much more renowned name than the entire alliance of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, and their strength perhaps was stronger as well. And furthermore, the Head Master of the Shaolin School, Abbot Fang-Zheng, is well respected by the entire Martial World. As regard to the Kunlun School, Master mentioned many times before that the sword arts of the Kunlun School fly its own colors and have qualities of both power and speed. When these two schools have joined forces, the combined power can be devastating. Most probably they are only vanguards, and more reinforcement are just on their way. But why did Master and Master-Wife have to avoid them?” Then he thought better of it, “I got it. Master is the Head Master of a reputable orthodox school. It would be embarrassing for him to be seen mixed up with people like Huang Boliu who don’t have a good reputation.”

“Didn’t we just hear someone playing the zither a moment ago? Where is that one hiding then? Brother Xin and Brother Yi, there’s something odd here,” the man named Tan from the Kunlun School spoke again.

“That’s right! Brother Tan, you are so attentive. Let’s search around and ferret him out,” the man with the thunderous voice suggested.

“Senior apprentice brother Xin, I’ll check out that shack over there,” another voice replied.

From these words, Linghu Chong could tell that the man's surname was Yi, and the man with the thunderous voice had a surname of Xin and was the man's senior apprentice brother. Then he heard the man named Yin walking toward the shack.

"I am alone by myself. It's already late at night; it would not have been appropriate manners for a female to greet male visitors," a clear voice of a female rose from inside the shack.

"She's a woman," Xin uttered.

"Was it you who played the zither earlier?" the man named Yi asked.

"That's right," the granny answered.

"Why don't you play a few notes for us?" Yi proposed.

"I did not know you before; how could I play the zither for you, sir?" the granny replied.

"Who cares," Xin let out a disgruntled snort. "So many excuses. I bet there's something odd inside the shack. Let's get in there and find out."

"What is a woman, alone, doing on the Five-Tyrant Ridge so late at night? Most likely you are of the same kind as those heterodoxy devils. We are coming in for a search," Yi exclaimed and walked toward the shack door.

"Hold it!" Linghu Chong stepped out from his hiding place and yelled, blocking the entrance to the shack.

Having not expected this at all, the three men were slightly taken aback. But when they saw that it was only a young man, they didn't care much.

"Who are you, young man? What are you doing hiding so sneakily in the dark?" Xin yelled loudly.

"I am Linghu Chong, an apprentice of the Huashan School. I am here to pay my respects to senior masters of the Shaolin School and the Kunlun School," Linghu Chong replied, bowing deeply toward the three.

"Oh, you are from the Huashan School. What are you doing here?" Yi let out a snort and inquired.

Linghu Chong glanced at the three men. The man named Xin was not particularly tall, but his chest protruded out like a drum; no wonder he had such a thunderous voice. Another middle-aged man wore the same type of dark reddish brown long robe; then he had to be the one named Yi from the same school. The man named Tan from the Kunlun School carried a sword on his back. With a loose robe with long sleeves, he dressed with negligent grace.

Instead of waiting for Linghu Chong to answer, Yi asked again, "If you say you are an apprentice of an orthodox school, why are you on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge?"

Ever since Linghu Chong had heard them cursing wildly without a qualm, he had been greatly annoyed. Now when he heard the incivility in the man's tone, he rebuffed, "The three senior masters are also members of the orthodox schools. Aren't you on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge as well?"

"Well said," the man named Tan laughed. "About this zither playing woman in the shack, do you know who she is?"

"She is an elderly granny with eminent virtues who stands aloof from the worldly affairs," Linghu Chong replied.

"Nonsense!" Yi reproved. "Listen to her voice. How can she be that old. What granny rubbish!"

"So this granny has a melodious voice. That's nothing strange! Even her nephew is twenty or thirty years older than you, not mentioning granny herself." Linghu Chong grinned.

"Move aside! We'll go in and take a look, ourselves," Yi demanded, but Linghu Chong stretched his arms and blocked the way.

"Granny has already said it. It's already late at night, and it would not have been appropriate manners for a female to greet male visitors. She doesn't know any of you. Why would she want to see you for no reasons?"

Yi suddenly whisked his sleeve, which sent a stream of force sweeping toward Linghu Chong. Having lost all of his inner strength, Linghu Chong had no way of withstanding the strike. Thump, he collapsed down.

Yi did not expect him to have no inner strength at all, and was taken by quite a surprise. "You say you are an apprentice of the Huashan School? I am afraid you are just blowing your own horn!" he sneered and then walked toward the shack, again.

Linghu Chong stood back up, a scratch mark on his face – apparently from the sharp rocks on the ground.

"Granny does not want to see you. How can you be so insolent? Back in the city of Luoyang, I talked with granny for many days and still didn't get to see her."

"Hey chap, watch out for your manners. You'd better move aside, or you'll only end up with another big fall," Yi said with a menacing grin.

"The Shaolin School is the most reputable orthodox school in the entire Martial World. The two of you must have been elite laymen masters of the Shaolin School. And this one must have been a renowned master of the Kunlun School. But bullying an elderly granny late at night? Aren't you afraid to become the laughing stock for the entire Martial World?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Where do you find so much rubbish?" Yi bellowed. Suddenly, he shot his left hand out and with a loud smack, slapped Linghu Chong heavily in the left cheek.

Although Linghu Chong had lost all of his inner strength, seeing Yi lowing his right shoulder slightly, he knew immediately that Yi was going to strike him with his left hand. He wanted to dodge out of the way hurriedly, except that his body did not comply, and the strike landed on his face, solid and square. The force sent his body spinning and he fell down once again.

"Junior apprentice brother Yi, this man doesn't know martial arts. There's no need to lower yourself to the same level as him. Those evil devils have all ran away. Let's go!" the man named Xin proposed.

"All the heterodoxy evil devils in the Shandong Province and the Henan Province congregated on top of the Five-

Tyrant Ridge all of a sudden, and then dispersed into nowhere so abruptly. The congregation was strange, and the dispersion was also peculiar. We must get to the bottom of it. I think there's a good chance we'll be able to find some clues inside that shack," Yi replied.

Linghu Chong stood up again, a sword now emerging in his grip.

"Senior master Yi, I owe this granny in the shack great favor. As long as I am still breathing, I won't let you offend her," he declared firmly.

"With what? Just with the sword in your hand?" Yi burst into loud laughter sarcastically.

"I am a junior with only insignificant skills. How can I ever be a match for an elite fighter of the Shaolin School? However, nothing can weigh more than righteous reasons. If you want to enter the shack, you'll have to kill me first," Linghu Chong replied with dignity.

"Junior apprentice brother Yi, this chap certainly has moral integrity. Why don't we have it his way and just let it go?" Xin urged.

"I heard that the sword arts of your Huashan School are rather original, and there's also the break up of the Sword-Branch and the Qi-Branch. Now, do you belong to the Sword-Branch, or the Qi-Branch, or, rather, the Fart-Branch? Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" Yi grinned an evil grin and then broke into a loud laughter. At the sound of his laughter, Xin and Tan also joined him and laughed out loud.

"Use one's strength to bully the weak, what kind of reputable orthodox schools are you? Did you say that you were members of the Shaolin School? You probably are only boasting!" Linghu Chong spoke again, loud and clear.

Exasperated, Yi raised his right hand and was ready to strike it toward Linghu Chong's chest. If this strike got launched, for sure Linghu Chong would be killed on the spot.

"Hold it!" Xin stopped Yi from striking out. "Linghu Chong, are you saying that apprentices of a reputable

orthodox school can not fight the others?"

"Apprentices of a reputable orthodox school always have legit reasons behind each fight," Linghu Chong answered.

Yi stretched his palm out slowly. "I'll count one, two, three. By the time I count to three, if you still don't move aside, I'll break three ribs of yours. One!"

"Breaking three ribs of mine? That's nothing!" Linghu Chong let out a slight smile.

"Two!" Yi counted loudly.

"Little friend, this junior apprentice of mine really put words into deeds. I think you'd better move aside quickly," Xin suggested.

"But words coming out of my mouth also count. Linghu Chong is not dead, yet. How can I let you insult the granny?" Linghu Chong replied with a smile.

After these words, Linghu Chong knew that Yi's palm strike would be soon coming. Taking a deep breath secretly, he put all his strength onto his right arm. But the effort immediately brought a violent pain to his chest as thousands of imaginary golden stars started flickering wildly in front of his eyes.

"Three!" Yi snarled and took a step forward with his left foot. Seeing that Linghu Chong had his back leaning against the door plank of the shack, a sneer brewing on the corner of his mouth, having no intention to move aside, Yi struck out with his right palm.

Linghu Chong almost suffocated when the force carried by the strike reached him. He pushed his long sword out, the tip of his sword pointing at the middle of Yi's palm. The positioning and the timing of the push were simply brilliant! Yi's palm strike was already fully executed and it was already too late for him to withdraw the strike. A light dull sound and a loud cry of pain echoed as the tip of the long sword penetrated the middle of Yi's palm. Pulling his palm backward hastily, with another dull sound, he had drawn his hand off the sword tip, but the damage was done. He had

inflicted a severe injury. Leaping back dozens of feet, he drew his long sword by his waist with a mixed feeling of shock and fury.

"The damn chap was only acting dumb. So you actually have outstanding Kung Fu. I...I'll fight you to the end!" he growled.

Xin, Yi, and Tan, all three of them, were experts in sword arts. Seeing that when Linghu Chong pushed his sword put, he wasn't using any move, and only with his control of the positioning and timing of his sword, he had managed to have his opponent sending his palm onto the tip of the sword of his own accord. His attainments in sword arts had truly reached the highest stage of the realm.

Although Yi was infuriated, he dared not to underestimate Linghu Chong. Holding the long sword in his left hands, he shot out three quick thrusts, all of which were fake attacks to test the opponent. Each of the thrusts only went half way before he drew the sword back.

That night when Linghu Chong had blinded fifteen elite fighters outside of the Buddha of Herb Monastery, even though he had already lost all his inner strength by then, he had still been in a much better shape compared to now. The several ordeals since then had really done him in. By now he almost felt incapable of raising his sword. Seeing the three fake attacks from Yi and how the sword tip vibrated continuously, he knew those must have been superior sword moves of the Shaolin School, which only made him more reluctant of making Yi an enemy.

"I intend absolutely no offense to three senior masters. If the three of you would walk away, I...I will apologize most sincerely."

"It's too late to beg for mercy now!" Yi grunted. Thrusting his sword forward in lightning speed, he shot the sword tip toward Linghu Chong's throat.

Linghu Chong knew too well that with his current weak physical condition, there was not a chance that he would be

able to dodge out of this attack. Having no alternatives, he also thrust his sword forward. Even though his thrust was launched after Yi's thrust, it reached the target earlier. With a thud, the tip of his sword struck Yi on the vital acupoint on his left wrist. Yi opened his palm in pain, and his long sword fell to the ground.

By then, the light of dawn had already appeared from the east. Staring at the drops of blood rolling down his left wrist and then dripping down to the ground, Yi couldn't even believe his eyes. After a long while, he heaved a deep sigh, turned around, and strode away. The man named Xin never wanted to become enemies of the Huashan School to start with. Now after he witnessed this brilliant and unsurpassed thrust Linghu Chong had just put on display, he knew he wouldn't even stand a chance fighting Linghu Chong. Concerned about his apprentice brother's injury, he called out, "Apprentice brother Yi," and then ran after Yi.

"Are you really an apprentice of the Huashan Sword School?" the man named Tan finally asked after gazing at Linghu Chong for a good while.

"Yes, I am!" Linghu Chong answered as he struggled to maintain his balance on the verge of a total collapse.

Tan could tell that Linghu Chong was suffering from very serious internal injuries. Even though Linghu Chong had showed outstanding sword skills, all he had to do was to wait a few moments more. He didn't even have to attack, and Linghu Chong would just collapse on his own.

"One injured and one scared away, both elite fighters from the Shaolin School suffered setbacks because of this young man from the Huashan School. If I can knock him down and then seize him, bringing him to the Shaolin Temple, not only would I have done the Shaolin School a great favor, our Kunlun School would also look real good in the central region of the Martial World," Tan thought inwardly as he took a step forward and then said with a smile.



“Young man, your sword skills are not too shabby at all. How about a contest in the realm of palm and hand techniques between the two of us? What do you say?”

Just a glance at Tan's face had given Linghu Chong enough idea about what Tan had in his mind. “This man is so deceitful. He is even more detestable than that Yi from the Shaolin School,” he couldn't help but think. Raising his sword, he stabbed it out toward Tan's shoulder, but his strength drained out of him so quickly that the stab only traveled halfway before he lost the grip of the sword. “Clank!” His sword fell to the ground.

Tan was almost ecstatic. Wasting no time, he struck out with a powerful palm strike, and the strike landed heavily on Linghu Chong's chest. Linghu Chong's body jerked back violently as blood spurted out from mouth. There was only a short space between the two, and the spurt of blood splashed all over Tan's face, leaving even a few drops inside his mouth. Tan felt the taste of blood inside his mouth, but he didn't pay much attention to it, and raised his right palm, ready for another palm strike, deeply afraid that Linghu Chong might pick up his sword and launch a counterattack. But suddenly he felt great dizziness, and before he knew it, he had dropped to the ground.

Seeing that Tan had suddenly fainted when he, himself, was at his last gasp, Linghu Chong was taken by total surprise. But at the meanwhile, he couldn't help feeling very lucky. Tan's face now showed a shade of dark color, and the muscle on his face twisted and twitched, making his face looking utterly strange and horrible.

“You have only yourself to blame for not initializing your inner strength properly!” Linghu Chong muttered.

He looked around him in all directions. It was indeed a very strange scene. There was not another person on the Five-Tyrant Ridge. The only sound was the chirping from the many birds on treetops, and the only things left were the

many wine kettles, bowls, and dish plates, which scattered all over the place.

"Granny, how have you been these days?" after wiping the blood off his lips with his sleeves, he asked.

"Young Master, you are too fatigued right now. Please sit down and take a rest," the granny replied.

Linghu Chong was truly exhausted by now. Hearing the granny's words, he sat down to the ground. The zither music rose gently in the shack once again. It almost felt like a stream of clear spring, which had washed over his entire body, and then flew through him. Linghu Chong felt as though his body had become lighter and lighter, and had floated on top of the white clouds that felt like cotton wool. After a long time, the sound of the zither became lower and lower, until eventually it was so dim that it was barely audible.

Linghu Chong felt much rejuvenated. Getting back onto his feet, he bowed deeply.

"Many thanks, Granny. I have benefited a great deal from your kind music."

"You risked your life to repel powerful enemies, saving me from being humiliated by rascals. It is I who feel thankful for you," the granny replied.

"Don't mention it. I was only doing the right thing."

The granny fell silent, and a few tender sounds from the zither echoed, as though the granny was plucking the strings of the zither randomly while wavering upon something in her mind. After a while, she asked.

"Where...where are you going now?"

Feeling of desolation welled up in Linghu Chong's heart, which almost choked him and made him cough uncontrollably for a good while. It just seemed that there was not a place between heaven and earth he could shelter himself.

"I...I have nowhere to go," after finally catching his breath, Linghu Chong murmured.

"Aren't you going to look for your Master and Master-Wife? How about your apprentice brothers and apprentice... sister?"

"Them...I don't know where they went. With my injury, the chance of finding them is too slim. Besides, even if I do find them, alas!" Linghu Chong heaved a deep sigh, thinking, "Even if I do find them, so what? They don't want me now."

"Your injury is very severe. Why don't you visit some beautiful scenery to relieve boredom? Wouldn't that be better than feeling miserable in vain?"

"Granny, you are right!" Linghu Chong let out a few laughs. "I never really cared much about life and death to begin with. Farewell for now! I guess I'll be strolling about for some fun!"

After bowing toward the shack one more time, Linghu Chong turned around and walked away. But only after three steps, he heard the granny's voice again.

"Are you...are you leaving already?"

"Yes." Linghu Chong halted his steps.

"But you have severe injuries. If you travel by yourself, there will be no one to tend upon you along the trip. That won't be appropriate."

Sensing the caring and concern in the granny's words, Linghu Chong felt another surge of warmth in his heart.

"Thank you, granny, for your kind concern. My injury is incurable. It's really no difference whether I die earlier or later, here or there."

"Hmm, I see. But...but..." the granny paused for quite a while before finishing her sentence, "what if those two rascals from the Shaolin School come back to cause more trouble? What should I do? And that Tan Diren from the Kunlun School is only unconscious temporarily. Once he wakes up, I am afraid he'll trouble me more."

"Granny, where are you going? Why don't I escort you for a stage of the journey?" Linghu Chong suggested.

"That would have been great, except that there's a big difficulty involved. I am afraid that it will trouble you a great deal," the granny answered.

"Granny, you saved my life. It's no trouble at all."

The granny heaved a sigh and then said, "A very formidable enemy of mine came to the Bamboo-Green Alley to give me trouble, that's why I have come here to hide. But I am sure he would trace me down in no time. Your injury has not recovered and won't be able to fight him. I only want to find a secluded place to hide from him temporarily, so I can wait till all my helps arrive before settling accounts with him. If I ask you to escort me, then firstly, you are injured, and secondly, wouldn't it bore you to death for such an active and lively young man to accompany such an old granny?"

Linghu Chong burst into loud laughter.

"Is that it? That's a piece of cake. Where are you headed? I'll go with you. Even if it's the end of the earth, as long as I am not dead, I'll accompany you there."

"I'll be troubling you then. Are you serious that even if it's the end of the earth, you'll still accompany me there?" the granny asked, her voice filled with joy.

"That's right! Even if it's the end of the earth, Linghu Chong will accompany Granny there," Linghu Chong promised.

"But there's another difficulty here," the granny added.

"What is that?" Linghu Chong asked.

"My face is very ugly. Anyone seeing my face will be very much frightened. Therefore I do not wish anyone to see my face. Otherwise, I wouldn't have objected those three men when they wanted to enter the shack to see me. You must promise me that under any circumstance, you will never cast a look at me. You can't look at my face, my body, my hands, my feet, or even my clothes."

"I am grateful that Granny cared for me and I respect Granny very much. What has Granny's appearance has anything to do with it?" Linghu Chong replied.

"If you can't promise that, please leave now."

"Fine, fine! I promise. I promise that I'll never cast a look at you under any circumstances," Linghu Chong agreed hurriedly.

"You can't even cast a look at my back," the granny added.

"Could your back have been utterly ugly as well?" Linghu Chong thought to himself. "The ugliest back had to be from a midget, or a hunchback. But even those are no big deal. It's not gonna be easy if I can't even look at your back throughout such a long journey."

"You can't do it?" the granny asked, sensing Linghu Chong's hesitation.

"I can. I can. If I cast even one look at Granny, I'll cut my own eyes out," Linghu Chong answered.

"You'd better remember that. You go first. I'll follow behind you."

"Sure!" Linghu Chong answered and then began taking the path down the ridge. Sounds of footsteps rose behind him. The granny followed.

After walking for a few dozen of feet, the granny handed Linghu Chong a branch from behind.

"You can use this branch as your crutch."

"Okay," Linghu Chong answered.

Using the branch as a crutch to support himself, he walked down the ridge slowly. After some more walking, he suddenly remembered something.

"Granny, you know that name of that Tan from the Kunlun School?" he asked.

"Oh, that Tan Diren is a good hand amount the second generation of apprentices in the Kunlun School. He mastered about sixty to seventy percent of his Master's sword skills. But compared to his big apprentice brother and second apprentice brother, he is still far behind. That big fellow Xin Guoliang from the Shaolin School has better sword skills than him."

“So that man with a loud voice is named Xin Guoliang. He seemed to be reasonable.”

“His junior apprentice brother’s name is Yi Guozi. That one was a total jerk. Those two thrusts of yours, one penetrating his palm, the other one injuring his left wrist, were quite handsome.”

“I had no choice. Alas, now I’ve started a feud with the Shaolin School. That can only bring endless of future trouble.”

“What about the Shaolin School? There’s a good chance we can beat them. I didn’t expect that Tan Diren would hit you with a palm strike, and I had no idea that you would spurt blood.”

“Granny, you saw everything? I wonder why that Tan Diren suddenly passed out cold.”

“Didn’t you know? Blue Phoenix and the four Miao Girls under her command gave you a lot of blood. They are around venomous pests days and nights, so naturally their blood contained poison. Besides, the Five-Sylph Wine is utmost toxic. When your poisonous blood splashed into his mouth, of course he could not stand it.”

“Oh!” Linghu Chong finally understood. “How could I stand it, then? How odd! I never had any grudges against that Chief Blue. I wonder why she would want to harm me.”

“Who said she wanted to harm you? She had all good intentions, humph, wishful thinking, wanting to cure your injury and all. To poison your blood yet preserve your life is the trick her Five-Sylph Sect is really good at.”

“I see. I thought that Chief Blue had no ill will toward me. Doctor Ping One-Finger said that her medicinal wine was the utmost tonic.”

“Of course she had no ill will toward you. She couldn’t have had more good will,” the granny exclaimed, which was returned by a smile on Linghu Chong’s face.

“Do you think that Tan Diren will survive it?”

“That depends on his own internal strength and how much poisonous blood splashed into his mouth.”

Remembering the expression on Tan Diren’s face after he was poisoned, Linghu Chong couldn’t help but shiver. After walking another hundred of feet, he suddenly remembered another thing and shouted out immediately.

“Oops, Granny, will you please wait here for me? I need to get back onto the ridge.”

“Why?” the granny asked.

“The remains of Doctor Ping’s body is still on the ridge and have not been buried yet.”

“No need to go back. I’ve already handled his body.”

“Oh, so Granny has already given Doctor Ping a burial.”

“Nah, it wasn’t a burial. I dissolved his body using dissolvent powder. Did you expect me to stare at a dead corpse all night long? Ping One-Finger didn’t look that great when he was still alive. After he turned into a corpse, you can imagine how he looked.”

Linghu Chong answered with a snort, but he couldn’t help thinking that the granny’s behavior was beyond all expectations. He owed Ping One-Finger great favor, and after Ping One-Finger passed away, he should have given him a proper burial, but this Granny opted to dissolve the body using dissolvent powder. The more he thought about this, the more uneasy he became, but as to why it was wrong to dissolve the body using dissolvent powder, he could not say.

After the both of them traveled for over a mile, they had arrived at the plain at the foot of the ridge.

“Open your palm!” the granny demanded.

“Okay!” Linghu Chong answered, feeling surprised, wondering what kind of trick she was going to play this time. He opened his palm as directed, and then with a small pop, a small object was thrown from behind his back and fell right in the middle of his palm. It was a yellow pill about the size of one’s little finger.

“Swallow it and then take a rest under that big tree,” the granny directed.

“Sure!” Linghu Chong answered and then swallowed the pill down his throat.

“I gave you medicine to extend your life only because I rely on your brilliant sword skills for a safe journey, so you won’t suddenly die on me and make me lose my escort. It’s not because I have any good intentions for...for you, much less an attempt to save your life. You’d better remember that,” the granny exclaimed.

Linghu Chong acknowledged with a snort. Walking by the tree he sat down, leaning against the trunk of the tree, when a stream of warmth rose up from his lower abdomen and then flowed into the many passages and channels inside his body. It felt as though the stream of warmth also carried much energy and rejuvenated all his internal organs and arteries.

“This pill obviously is of great benefit for me, but the granny just wouldn’t admit that she cared for me, and kept saying that she was only taking advantage of me. There are only people who deny everything once they took advantage of others. Why does she speak the opposite?” Linghu Chong pondered. “And when she threw the pill into my palm, the pill did not even bounce. Apparently she threw it with a sinking force, which could only have been executed with very high-level inner energy. Her Kung Fu skills are much higher than mine. She doesn’t need me to protect her. Well, if this is what she wants, I’ll just comply.”

“Granny, are you tired? Let’s go now,” after a brief rest, Linghu Chong stood up and said.

“I am tired. I need a bit more rest,” the granny answered.

“Okay,” Linghu Chong replied as he thought to himself, “For elder people, despite how excellent their Kung Fu skills might be, they still lack the level of vigor a youth possesses. I really should have shown more solicitude for the granny



instead of only thinking about myself." At that thought, he sat back down.

"Let's go," the granny finally said after a long while.

Linghu Chong answered with a nod, and then walked at the front while the granny followed him behind. The pill certainly made a great difference. Linghu Chong found himself walking at a brisk pace. Following the granny's instructions, he always picked desolated mountain trails. After a few miles of walking, the mountain trail gradually turned more and more rugged and rough, which made Linghu Chong breathe more heavily.

"I am tired. I need to take a break," the granny suddenly announced.

"Sure," Linghu Chong responded and then sat down on the ground, thinking to himself, "Her breathing is still deep and calm. She can't be tired at all. She obviously wants me to take a break, but would rather claim that she was the one tired."

After resting for about ten minutes, the two set out walking again. After turning a mountain ridge, they suddenly heard a loud voice talking.

"Everybody hurry up with your meal. We need to get out of here as soon as possible. This place is apt to get into trouble," the voice exclaimed, which was answered by dozens of people all together.

Linghu Chong paused his steps and glanced over, then saw dozens of men sitting in a circle eating their food on a stretch of meadow by the mountain stream. By then, these men had also spotted Linghu Chong and someone had already shouted out.

"It's Young Master Linghu!"

Linghu Chong vaguely remembered seeing them on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge the night before. Just when he was about to shout his greetings, suddenly, the dozens of men all froze and goggled toward the direction behind his back in dead silence, their faces looking totally awkward. Some

looked terrified, while some others looked perplexed and alarmed, as though they had suddenly encountered something so inexpressibly peculiar, something they did not know how to deal with.

As soon as Linghu Chong saw the bizarre scene, he wanted to look back over his shoulder to find out what on earth had happened behind him that would have turned the dozens of people into clay idols and wooden dummies, but he suddenly realized: these people only reacted like this because they saw the Granny behind him, and he had promised the granny that he would never cast a look at her. At that thought, he hurriedly jerked his head to look forward again. The strength he put in was so overwhelming that his neck muscle ached because of it. But meanwhile, his curiosity soared.

“Why are they so terrified at the sight of the granny? Could the granny have really been so gruesome looking that it makes her totally out of this world?” he couldn’t help but think.

Suddenly, a man raised the dagger he had been using to slice meat and stabbed toward his two eyes. Instantly, blood gushed out of his eye sockets.

“What are you doing?” astonished, Linghu Chong shouted out.

“I lost my eyes three days ago, and have not been able to see anything ever since,” the man exclaimed loudly.

Within seconds, another two men also drew their short knives and blinded themselves with a few quick stabs. “We’ve been blind for ages. We could not see a thing,” they also exclaimed.

Linghu Chong was dumbstruck. Seeing that the rest men in the group also each drew out their daggers and awls and were about to blind themselves just the same, he yelled out hastily.

“Hey! Hey! Hold it! Let’s talk it over. Don’t hurt yourselves. Why...why do you do that?”

"I was going to swear an oath that I'll never dare talk about it, but I am afraid that it would not be convincing," a man answered in a saddened voice.

"Granny, please do something. Ask them to stop blinding themselves, will you?" Linghu Chong shouted.

"Very well, I trust you. There's an island called Twine-Dragon Island in the East Sea. Has any of you heard of it before?" the granny asked.

"There's an island called Twine-Dragon Island about two hundred miles from the Quanzhou City in Fujian. I heard that it's an untraversed and desolated island," an old man answered.

"That's the one. Why don't you set out right away to have some fun on the Twine-Dragon Island? There's no need for you to ever come back to the central region again," the granny said.

"We'll set out right away!" the dozens of men answered in unison, all looking very pleased.

"We'll never speak to anybody else on our way there," someone added.

"Whether you speak or not, what has that gotten anything to do with me?" the granny spoke in a chilling tone.

"Right! Right! I was just talking rubbish," the man answered immediately, and raising his hands high, he began slapping his own face.

"Go now!" the granny ordered.

At the command, the dozens of men broke into a gallop. The tree blind fellows, helped by the arm by their fellow companions, also walked away in strides. Within moments, all of them had vanished from sight.

Linghu Chong gasped with astonishment. "Just a few words from the granny have banished all those people to a desolate island in the East Sea, with no hope of returning within this life, yet all these people appeared highly delighted at the punishment as though they have just received their pardoned. This is just so inconceivable."

He walked on silently, many thoughts surging in his mind, thinking that the granny following behind him had to be the most eccentric oddball he had ever seen.

"I just hope we won't walk into more friends from the Five-Tyrant Ridge along our way," Linghu Chong thought to himself. "They all came warmheartedly for curing my injury. If by any chance they bump into the granny, then either they had to blind themselves, or be banished to some barren island in the sea. That would certainly not be worthwhile. It looks as if the reason why Chief Huang, Chieftain Sima, and Zu Qianqiu asked me to pretend that I had never met them, and the reason why the many people on the Five-Tyrant Ridge dispersed all of a sudden, were all because of this granny. They were scared of this granny. So what...what kind of horrible monster is she?" At that thought, he couldn't help but shiver.

After they had walked another three or four miles, a voice suddenly shouted a distance away behind them, "That's Linghu Chong over there." The voice was extremely loud and thunderous. Linghu Chong didn't even have to guess whose voice that had belonged to - Xin Guoliang from the Shaolin School.

"I don't want to see him. You muddle with him," the granny declared.

"All right," Linghu Chong answered as the scrubs by his side rustled. The granny had hidden herself among the bushes.

"Uncle-Master, that Linghu Chong is wounded. He can't walk very fast," Xin Guoliang's voice rose again.

There was actually still quite a distance between them, but because Xin Guoliang's voice was simply too loud, even just a casual remark from him would make its way into Linghu Chong's ears clearly.

"So he came with his Uncle-Master," Linghu Chong thought. Since they've already seen him, he decided to just sit by the side of the path and wait for them.

After a short while, sounds of footsteps echoed as several men walked along the path in quick strides. Xin Guoliang and Yi Guozi were both among the group. There were also two monks and a middle-aged man. One of the monks was a very old man with many wrinkles across his face. The other monk was about thirty years of age and held a Buddhist's Spade in his hand.

Linghu Chong stood up and then bowed down deeply.

"Linghu Chong, a junior of the Huashan School here shows his respects to the many senior masters of the Shaolin School. May I have the honor to hear senior masters' names?" he greeted.

"Chap..." Yi Guozi yelled but interrupted by the old monk.

"Old monk's Buddhist's name is Fang-Sheng," the old monk replied.

As soon as the old monk spoke out, Yi Guozi held his tongue, but the glooming expression on his face clearly showed that he was still infuriated about the setback he suffered moments back.

"I pay my respects to the Great Master!" Linghu Chong put his palms together and bowed.

"Young Hero, please don't be over-courteous. How is your respectful master Mr. Yue?" Fang-Sheng nodded and then spoke with a kind and pleasant countenance.

At first, when Linghu Chong heard the group bearing down after him so menacingly, he was alarmed and on tenterhooks. After seeing Monk Fang-Sheng speaking and behaving with the demeanor of a sensible and accomplished monk, also knowing that monks of the "Fang" generation were the most senior ones in the Shaolin Temple as apprentice brothers of the temple abbot, Great Master Fang-Zheng, he reckoned that Monk Fang-Sheng was not someone who persisted unreasonably like that Yi Guozi and felt some relief at once.

"Thank you for asking, Great Master! My Master is well and sound," he answered respectfully.

"These four are all my Nephew-Apprentices. This monk's Buddhist's name is Jue-Yue, this is Nephew-Apprentice Huang Guobo, this is Nephew-Apprentice Xin Guoliang, and that's Nephew-Apprentice Yi Guozi. I believe you have met Xin and Yi before," Fang-Sheng introduced.

"Ah, yes! Linghu Chong here shows his respects to four senior masters. I have severe wounds and cannot move about freely. If there's any lack of manners on my side, I beg for senior masters' pardon." Linghu Chong cupped his hands.

"You have severe wounds?" Yi Guozi let out a disgruntled snort.

"Do you really have severe wounds? Guozi, was it you who wounded him?" Fang-Sheng asked.

"It was just a misunderstanding. There's nothing to it. Senior master Yi threw me to the ground with a brush of his sleeve and then hit me with a palm strike also. But don't worry. I can probably still hang on to my life for a short while. Great Master, you don't need to reproach senior master Yi," Linghu Chong said.

He intentionally mentioned about his severe wounds at the very beginning, and also blamed it all on Yi Guozi, thinking that Fang-Sheng, the capable and senior monk, would certainly not allow those four Nephew-Apprentices of his to make trouble for him again.

"Senior master Xin saw everything with his own eyes on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge," he continued. "But since Great Master has come yourself. That's a great favor for a junior like me. I promise you that I'll never mentioned this incident in front of my Master. You can rest assured, Great Master, that even though my wounds are incurable, this incident will not stir up any dispute between the Five Mountains Sword Alliance and the Shaolin School."

With these words, it sounded as though it was all Yi Guozi's fault that he had suffered severe and incurable

injuries.

“That...that...that’s total nonsense! You were severely injured all along. What have I gotten anything to do with it?” Yi Guozi snarled.

“Well, senior master Yi, I don’t think it’s a good idea to mention that to anybody. If the story gets out, wouldn’t that have stained the clean fame of the Shaolin School?” Linghu Chong let out a gentle sigh and then said quietly.

Xin Guoliang, Huang Guobo, and Jue-Yue all nodded slightly, fully understanding what Linghu Chong had meant. The “Fang” generation monks of the Shaolin School had extreme seniority in the Martial World. Although the Shaolin School is a separate school from the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, when ranked by seniority, they would have equated to masters one generation above the Head Masters of each of the Five Mountains sword schools. Therefore, Xin Guoliang and Yi Guozi’s seniority would also be one generation above Linghu Chong. When Yi Guozi had fought Linghu Chong, one could have already called that a senior bullies a junior, not mentioning that the Shaolin School had two masters at the scene, and on top of that, Linghu Chong had already been severely injured before the fight. The Shaolin School had very strict school rules. If Yi Guozi had really slain a junior from the Huashan School, the punishment could have been as severe as the capital punishment to pay with his life. At least, he would have been stripped off all his Kung Fu skills and be expelled from the school. When Yi Guozi thought of the consequences, his face whitened from fear.

“Young hero, please come closer. Let me take a look at your wounds,” Fang-Sheng proposed.

Linghu Chong stepped closer. Fang-Sheng reached out with his right hand and then gripped Linghu Chong’s wrist. As soon as he placed his fingers on the “Da-Yuan” and the “Jing-Qu” acupoints on Linghu Chong’s wrist, he felt a stream of peculiar inner energy inside Linghu Chong’s body, which gave his fingers a violent jolt and made them slip off the

acupoints. Fang-Sheng felt a shock in his heart. He was one of the few top fighters among the highest generation of Shaolin monks. It was simply unimaginably queer that the inner energy inside the young man was powerful enough to jolt away his fingers. How could he have known that there were inner energy streams from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Monk No Commandment inside Linghu Chong's body? Although he had top notch Kung Fu, himself, when caught off guard, he still could not stand the combined force from those seven elite fighters. He couldn't help but utter a light cry of surprise. Fixed his stare on Linghu Chong's eyes, he spoke slowly.

"Young hero, you are not from the Huashan School."

"I am really an apprentice of the Huashan School. I was the first apprentice my master Mr. Yue ever took in," Linghu Chong replied.

"Then why did you learn the heretical Kung Fu from heterodoxy people afterwards?" Fang-Sheng requested.

"Uncle-Master, this chap is without a doubt using heterodoxy Kung Fu. There's no point denying it. Didn't we see a woman follow behind him just now? Where is she hiding now? I bet she is no good egg, acting so clandestine and all!" Yi Guozi cut in.

"You are a member of a renowned school. How can you be so out of manners?" hearing Yi Guozi insulting the granny, Linghu Chong yelled angrily. "Granny just doesn't want to see you so as not to get angry over you."

"You tell her to come out. Whether she is good or evil, my Uncle-Master can tell with his sharp eyes," Yi Guozi dared him.

"Our dispute started because you were disrespectful to my granny. Haven't you spoken enough nonsense?" Linghu Chong rebuffed.

"Young hero Linghu," Jue-Yue joined in, "earlier when I looked by the hill, I could see that the woman following



behind you walked in very nimble steps, and didn't seem to be an aged woman."

"Granny is a member of the Martial World. It's only natural that she had nimble steps. What's so odd about that?" Linghu Chong disagreed.

"Jue-Yue, we are members of the Buddha's order. How can we insist on seeing the elder, female member of other people?" Fang-Sheng reproved. Turning toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Young hero Linghu, there are many doubtful points in this matter that I could not figure out. You are indeed severely wounded. But your internal wounds are completely out of the ordinary. It could not have been my Nephew-Apprentice Yi who had caused the injuries. It is fate that has brought us here together today. I wish you a speedy recovery. Farewell for now. Your internal injury is very serious. I have two pills here that you can take. But I am afraid they won't cure...." Fang-Sheng reached into his chest pocket.

Linghu Chong felt his admiration soar in his heart. "An accomplished monk from Shaolin shows extraordinary bearings indeed," he thought to himself. Bowing toward Fang-Sheng, he said, "It is so fortunate that I can meet Great Master...."

Before he had a chance to finish his words, suddenly a loud ring echoed and Yi Guozi had unsheathed his sword.

"Here she is!" Yi shouted excitedly and then dived into the bush where the granny had been hiding, sword first.

"Nephew-Apprentice Yi, don't be rude!" Fang-Sheng shouted.

With a loud whoosh, Yi Guozi had flown back out from the bush and after gliding tens of feet in the air. Smack, he dropped to the ground like a log, facing upwards. His arms and legs twitched a few times and then he became still.

Fang-Sheng and the rest of the people were astounded. A hole had appeared on Yi's forehead, from which blood gushed out. He still held a tight grip of the long sword in his hand, but he had already stopped breathing.

Xin Guoliang, Huang Guobo, and Jue-Yue roared in unison. Each gripping his weapon tightly they made at the bush in fury. Fang-Sheng extended his arms to his sides, and as the loose sleeves of the monk's robe spread open, a powerful yet soft stream of energy force blocked the three men like an invisible wall.

"May I ask which friend from the Dark-Wood Cliff has come here?" turning toward the bush Fang-Sheng asked gravely, his voice loud and clear. But only silence followed, complete silence, which swept all over the hundreds of shrubs and bushes.

"Our school never had any imbroglia with the Dark-Wood Cliff. Why have you slain Nephew-Apprentice Yi with such murderous scheme?" he asked again, but still, no one responded from within the bushes.

"The Dark-Wood Cliff? The Dark-Wood Cliff is where the Demon's Cult is headquartered. Could...could this granny have been a senior member of the Demon's Cult?" Linghu Chong was thunderstruck.

"I've had the chance to make acquaintance with Chief Dongfang once many years ago. Friend, now that you have committed the murder, we must settle the discord once for all. Why don't you show yourself?" Fang-Sheng urged.

"Chief Dongfang? Is he talking about the chief of the Demon's Cult, Dongfang Invincible? That man was known as the number one fighter in the entire world. Then...then this granny really is a member of the Demon's Cult." Linghu Chong felt another shock shooting up his spine.

But the granny stayed behind the bushes and would not respond.

"Friend, if you insist on not showing yourself, please excuse the old monk's discourtesy then!" Fang-Sheng exclaimed as he retracted his arms slightly, and immediately, energy soared inside his two sleeves, inflating them like two large balloons. He pushed his arms forward and the powerful force shot out from his palms. A loud crack exploded in the

air as the dozens of scrubs all broke from the middle and small branches and leaves swirled in the midair. Right at that moment, a shadow leapt out from the remains of the bushes.

Even though Linghu Chong really wanted to take a look at the granny's appearance, he still remembered the promised he had made and quickly turned his back to it. He could hear the roaring and bellowing from Xin Guoliang and Jue-Yue, together with the sounds of weapons clashing with each other, so dense and so speedy that it sounded as though the raindrops from a thunderstorm bouncing off the window. Apparently the granny had already engaged in the fight with Fang-Sheng and his group.

It was about 10 o'clock in the morning, and the sun hung in a corner of the sky, casting rays of sunshine down from an angle. Although Linghu Chong found himself tormented by anxiety and curiosity, in order to keep his promise, he dared not turn his head around to glance at the fight, and only looked down at the ground where dark shadows cast by the five fighters fluttered wildly. Fang-Sheng and his three Nephew-Apprentices had surrounded the granny. Fang-Sheng was not holding any weapon in his hands; Jue-Yue was using a Buddhist's Spade; Huang Guobo used a knife; Xin Guoliang wielded a long sword. The granny had a pair of very short weapons in her hands. They looked like daggers, yet also assembled the shapes of Emei Stings. The weapons were short and thin, and almost looked as though they were transparent. Looking only based on the shadow from the sun Linghu Chong could not make out what kind of weapons they were. The granny and Fang-Sheng both fought quietly, whereas Xin Guoliang and the rest two all bellowed at the top of their lungs, which seemed to have made their attacks more menacing.

"Can't we talk this over? This is outrageous, four guys attacking an elderly granny at the same time!" Linghu Chong protested.

“An elderly granny? Ha-ha, this chap must be daydreaming. She...” Huang Guobo scoffed when Fang-Sheng suddenly shouted to him, “Huang...watch out!”

Huang suddenly uttered a painful cry. Evidently he had just taken a hard hit.

Linghu Chong was almost struck dumb with amazement. “This granny’s Kung Fu must have been terrific!” he thought. “Earlier when Great Master Fang-Sheng broke those scrubs with sheer energy force, he showed astonishing inner strength. But this granny is still able to get the upper hand one against four!”

Suddenly, Jue-Yue also cried loudly in pain. The Buddhist’s Spade flew out of his grip, over Linghu Chong’s head, and then fell to the ground dozens of feet away. By then, there were only three fluttering shadows on the ground. Both Huang Guobo and Jue-Yue had collapsed, and it was only Fang-Sheng and Xin Guoliang still left in the fight against the granny.

“What a sin! What a sin! You are too ruthless, killing my three Nephew-Apprentices one after another. I can no longer hold my hands. You give me no choice but to do everything in my power to contend with you,” Fang-Sheng exclaimed.

Loud clapping sounds followed. It appears that Great Master had wielded his weapon, which seems to have fallen under the category of a wooden club or staff. Linghu Chong only felt the turbulence of energy behind his back became swifter and fiercer, which compelled him to take steps forward again and again.

An accomplished Shaolin Monk was certainly no trivial matter. As soon as Great Master Fang-Sheng began using his weapon, the situation of the fight changed immediately. Linghu Chong could vaguely hear the granny gasping heavily as though she had used up her inner strength.

“Throw down your weapons! I won’t make this difficult for you. I only want you to come with me to the Shaolin Temple,

so I can tell the abbot apprentice brother what happened and then awaits his judgment,” Great Master Fang-Sheng said.

The granny did not respond, instead, she suddenly launched a series of quick attacks toward Xin Guoliang, who had a hard time fending them off and retreated from the fight, letting Great Master Fang-Sheng to take it over. After taking a short moment to collect himself, Xin Guoliang rejoined the fight, waving his long sword fiercely. After a few more minutes, the clanking sounds from the weapons clashing against each other gradually slowed down while the turbulence created by the inner energy streams turned louder and louder.

“Your inner strength is no match for me. If I were you, I would have thrown down the weapons and then go to the Shaolin Temple with me. Forcing yourself to go on with the fight would only result in severe internal injury,” Great Master Fang-Sheng persuaded.

The granny only replied with an angry snort. But suddenly she shrieked and Linghu Chong felt some kind of watery substance splashing onto the back of his neck. He wiped it with his hand and then looked at the hand, which was now in a color of dark red. What had splashed onto the back of his neck turned out to be blood.

“What a sin! What a sin! With your new wound, you won’t be able to hold out much longer. You should know that I have been holding back all along,” Great Master Fang-Sheng spoke again.

“This woman is an evil demon. Uncle-Master, please eradicate the evil and avenge the three apprentice brothers. How can we who any mercy to an evil monster?” Xin Guoliang snarled.

Linghu Chong could hear the heavy panting and the staggering footsteps of the granny, and it sounded as if she could be collapsing any minute. “The granny asked me to be her escort so I can protect her. How could I just stand by the

side when she is in great danger?" he thought to himself. With an echoing ring, he had unsheathed his long sword.

"Great Master Fang-Sheng, senior master Xin, please stop the fight, or else I'll have no choice but to offend you," Linghu Chong exclaimed loudly.

"We'll just eradicate this evil along with the other evil then," Xin Guoliang bellowed as he thrust his sword toward Linghu Chong's back.

Afraid that he might cast a glance at the granny, Linghu Chong dared not to turn around and simply dodged to the side.

"Watch out!" the granny shouted as Xin Guoliang also adjusted the angle of the thrust and still pushed his long sword toward Linghu Chong's back.

Suddenly Xin Guoliang screeched loudly as his body flew over Linghu Chong's left shoulder with an angle. Then a loud thump followed when his body hit the ground. His limbs twitched a few times before he finally stopped moving. Somehow the granny had managed to hit him with a lethal blow. Only seconds later, there was another loud thump. The granny had been hit with a palm strike from Great Master Fang-Sheng, which sent her flying in the air and then falling into the bushes.

"Granny, Granny! Are you alright?" Linghu Chong yelled in astonishment, then he heard the granny groaning in an undertone.

Feeling somewhat relieved that the granny was still alive, Linghu Chong turned slightly and then shot a thrust at Fang-Sheng. The positioning of the thrust was extremely clever and Fang-Sheng was forced to leap back. Linghu Chong immediately followed with another thrust, which Fang-Sheng managed to block with his weapon. By the time Linghu Chong withdrew his long sword, he had already turn completely around and was now standing in front of Great Master Fang-Sheng face to face. Now he finally saw the weapon Great Master was using: a three-foot long worn staff.

“Who would have expected his weapon to be simply a short staff?” Linghu Chong was taken aback. “This Shaolin monk’s inner strength is too overwhelming. If I don’t subdue him with my sword arts, the granny would die for sure.” At that thought, he quickly thrust up once, down once, and then up another twice, all using techniques taught by Feng Qingyang.

“You...you....” Great Master Fang-Sheng croaked, his face turning completely white.

Linghu Chong dared not to slow down in anyway, knowing too well what consequences that would have brought. He did not have any internal strength, so any slack would give his opponent the opportunity to overwhelm him with resourceful inner energy. Then undoubtedly he would be killed instantly and the granny would for sure be taken to the Shaolin Temple as a prisoner and later executed. He cleared his mind completely, and then poured out techniques after techniques from the profound “Dugu Nine Swords” at will. The “Dugu Nine Swords” sword art was the utmost fine and ingenious sword art. Although Linghu Chong had lost all his inner strength and had not fully understood all the subtleties of this sword art, his sword attacks forced Great Master Fang-Sheng to back up step after step. Soon, Linghu Chong felt the energy streams soaring inside his chest once again and his arms aching and limp; his sword moves also grew weaker and weaker.

“Drop your sword,” Fang-Sheng suddenly shouted out as he struck his left palm toward Linghu Chong’s solar plexus.

By then, Linghu Chong was already done up. He thrust his sword out, but only half way through with the thrust, his arm dropped down from exhaustion, which also lowered the sword. Grinding his teeth, Linghu Chong pushed the thrust forward anyway, but this slight delay had slowed his thrust quite a bit, and Great Master Fang-Sheng had already placed his left palm on Linghu Chong’s solar plexus, holding his inner strength back, asking, “Dugu Nine Swords! Where...?”

But right at that split of a second, Linghu Chong's sword also pierced into Fang-Sheng's pit of stomach. Ever since he met the Shaolin monk, Linghu Chong had held him in the highest regard. As soon as he felt the sword tip touching Fang-Sheng's skin, he pulled hastily with all his strength and withdrew his sword. Having used too much strength at the pull, he lost his balance and fell to the ground, blood gushing out from his mouth.

"Brilliant sword arts!" Great Master Fang-Sheng pressed his hand onto the wound on his chest and praised brightly. "If young hero had not shown mercy with your sword, my life would have perished right in front of my own eyes."

He did not mention a word about the fact that he had shown great mercy by holding back the power from his palm strike and began coughing wildly after speaking these words. Although Linghu Chong worked his best to withdraw the sword, the tip of the sword still cut into Fang-Sheng's chest, leaving a wound over an inch deep, injuring Fang-Sheng seriously.

"I am...am terribly...sorry that I...I have offended you, Great Master," Linghu Chong gasped.

"I certainly had not thought that senior master Feng Qingyang of Huashan had found a disciple for his brilliant sword arts. I had once received great graciousness from senior master Feng many years ago. Today's matter, I...I can not decide for myself," Great Master Fang-Sheng speak softly. Reaching into his robe slowly, he took out a small paper bag and then unwrapped it, showing two pills in the size of two longans inside. "These are healing panaceas of the Shaolin Temple. You can take one," he said. After a slight hesitation, he said, "Give the other one to that woman."

"My injuries are incurable; why waste a perfectly good pill? Great Master, I think you should take the other pill yourself," Linghu Chong replied.

"I have no need of it."



Great Master Fang-Sheng shook his head and then set the two pills down in front of Linghu Chong. Turning his head around, he looked at the four corpses on the ground one by one, his face now looking mournful and grieved. Putting his palms together, he began reciting some Buddhist scriptures in a gentle voice, and gradually, a look of harmony started to blossom on his face, and eventually, his face appeared so peaceful as though it was glowing with a divine halo, looking “infinitely merciful.”

Feeling awfully lightheaded, Linghu Chong knew that he could not hold out much longer, so he picked up the two pills and took one down his throat.

When Great Master Fang-Sheng finally finished reciting the scriptures, he turned to Linghu Chong again.

“The disciple of senior master Feng’s Dugu Nine Swords can not have been a follower of evil. Young hero, you have great chivalry deep in your heart. Reasonably speaking, you should not die an untimely death. But the internal injury you are suffering is extremely peculiar and cannot be cured with medicine or acupuncture. The only way for you to stay alive would have to be studying advanced internal Qi-Gong, yourself. If you listen to an old Buddhist monk, I suggest you come to the Shaolin Temple together with me, and then I’ll entreat the Head Master apprentice brother to teach you the utmost supreme internal energy techniques of our Shaolin School. I am sure, then, your internal injuries can be cured.”

After some more coughs, he continued, “Only the few who possess the right Karma can study this set of Qi-Gong techniques. I, for example, do not have such fortune. The Head Master of the Shaolin School, my senior apprentice brother, is especially large-minded. He might find you the one with the right Karma to teach this supreme Kung Fu to.”

“Great Master, many thanks for your kindness. After I’ve escorted Granny to a safe place, if I were lucky to be still alive, I would pay a visit to the Shaolin Temple and pay my

respects to Great Master and the Head Master Abbot,” Linghu Chong replied respectfully.

“You...you call her Granny?” A look of surprise spread over Fang-Sheng’s face as he muttered. “Young hero, you are an apprentice of a reputable and orthodox school. You should not associate with evil. My suggestion is for your own good. It will be wise to reconsider.”

“A true man always keeps his words. How can I break my promise to others,” Linghu Chong exclaimed.

“Very well! I look forward to seeing young hero again in the Shaolin Temple.” Great Master Fang-Sheng sighed. Casting a quick glance at the four corpses on the ground, he murmured, “Four abandoned vessels,<sup>54</sup> burial or no burial, what difference does it show. When a soul leaves the mortal world, death ends it all.” Turning on his heels, he strolled away.

“Granny, are you...are you alright?” Linghu Chong asked while sitting on the ground, unable to move. He gasped wildly, his entire body aching.

Rustling sounds rose from behind his back as the granny came out of the bushes.

“I won’t die!” she replied. “You’d better go with that old monk. He said he could cure your internal injuries. The internal Qi-Gong techniques of the Shaolin School are absolutely matchless in the world. Why are you still here?”

“I promised to escort Granny, then of course I’ll escort all the way,” Linghu Chong answered.

“You’ve been wounded badly. How can you escort me?”

“Aren’t you wounded as well? We’ll see!” Linghu Chong grinned.

“I am an evil, heterodox monster, and you are an apprentice of a reputable, orthodox school. If you associate with me, aren’t I ruining the clean name of an apprentice of a reputable school?”

“I never had any clean name to start with. What do I care how others think of me? Granny, you have been so kind to

me. Linghu Chong is not one who doesn't know what's right and what's wrong. You have been severely wounded. If I leave you just like that, how can I ever see my own face in a mirror?"

"So you are saying that if I had not incurred any wounds, you would have left me just like that, aren't you?" the granny snapped.

Linghu Chong was slightly taken aback, but he smiled.

"If Granny you don't dislike me, a young and ignorant lad, and would prefer to have me around as company, then Linghu Chong is willing to stay by your side and be your chat partner. But I am afraid that I have always been a crude one who commits all kinds of outrages at will, and maybe only a few days into it, Granny would not want to talk to me any more."

The granny let out a snort but did not answer. Extending his arm backward, Linghu Chong handed the pill given by Great Master Fang-Sheng toward the granny.

"That Shaolin monk is truly remarkable. Granny, you killed four apprentices from his school, but he would rather spare the healing panacea for you instead of taking it himself. When he fought with you earlier, he probably held back some," he said.

"Humph! If he did hold back, how come he still wounded me? People like that pose as members of the reputable and orthodox school, hypocritically pretending to be the good guys. I despise them," the granny replied angrily.

"Granny, why don't you take this pill? After I took one, I did feel much better around my chest and my stomach," Linghu Chong suggested.

The granny acknowledged, but did not take the pill.

"Granny...", Linghu Chong spoke again but was cut off by the granny abruptly.

"We are the only two here. Why do you keep calling 'Granny,' 'Granny?' Can't you give it a rest?"

"Sure. That'll be fine. Why aren't you taking the pill?" Linghu Chong grinned.

"Since you think the healing pill of the Shaolin School is great, and the healing pill I gave you is no good, why didn't you take this pill from the old monk together with the one you took earlier?" the granny mocked.

"What? When did I ever say that your healing pill is no good? You are really wronging me. Besides, the Shaolin School's healing pill is great, and that's why I want you to take it, so you can gather up some strength sooner for the journey."

"I see, so you think it's too boring to be my company, don't you? Go ahead! Leave! Nobody is stopping you," the granny snapped again.

"Why is the granny so grumpy all of a sudden, always at odds with me? Oh, I got it. She is suffering from severe wounds and is not feeling well, then naturally her temper went high. I can't really blame her," Linghu Chong thought to himself. Grinning brightly, he said, "But I am too exhausted to even move half a step. Even if I wanted to go, I couldn't. Besides...besides...ha-ha...."

"Besides what? Ha-ha what?" the granny asked in an annoyed tone.

'Ha-ha is ha-ha. Besides, even if I could go, I wouldn't have wanted to go, unless you'll go together with me," Linghu Chong beamed.

At first, he had always maintained good manners when talking with the granny, but when she started to throw a fit and became unreasonable, he also became unbridled. But to his surprise, the granny did not get angry and suddenly fell into a silence, lost in thought.

"Granny...," Linghu Chong called out.

"You are calling me Granny again! Have you never called others 'Granny' before? Don't you get tired of calling that?" the granny reproved.

"From now on, I won't call you granny any more. How should I call you then?" Linghu Chong asked with a smile.

The granny did not answer him right away. Only after a few moments, she finally said, "We are the only two here. Why bother? As soon as you open your mouth, I'll know that you are talking to me. Could you have been talking to anybody else?"

"Sometimes I like to talk to myself. I hope you don't misunderstand," Linghu Chong smirked.

"Always talking so roguishly, no wonder your little apprentice sister doesn't want you." The granny snorted.

These words struck Linghu Chong right on the spot in his heart where it hurt the most. His heart sinking horribly, he couldn't help but think, "Little apprentice sister dislikes me and likes apprentice brother Lin. Maybe that really is because I am always roguish in doing things and saying things. That's why she was unwilling to commit her life to my care. That's right. Apprentice brother Lin always toes the line and acts like a perfect gentleman, almost an exact duplicate of Master. If I were a girl, I would have liked him and not the always ill-behaved prodigal, let alone little apprentice sister. Alas, Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! You always get drunk and run wild, pay no attention to school rules and regulations. You are beyond redemption. I made friends with the evil rapist Tian Boguang; I slept inside the brothel in the town of Hengyang. Little apprentice sister must have felt awful!"

"Why? Did I touch a sour spot? You are angry now, aren't you?" didn't hear a reply from Linghu Chong, the granny asked.

"No, I am not angry. You said it right. I always talk roguishly and doing things roguishly. No wonder little apprentice sister dislikes me, and Master, Master-Wife also dislike me." Linghu Chong answered, his voice gloomy.

"Don't be depressed. Your Master, Master-Wife, and your little apprentice sister dislike you doesn't mean that there's...

there's no one else who likes you," the granny comforted him, her voice so soft and gentle, filled with consolation.

Linghu Chong was utterly grateful. A feeling of warmth washing over him; he felt something choking in his throat.

"Granny, you are so kind to me, so even if nobody else in this world likes me, that...that would be all right."

"You surely have a honey mouth, always speaking pleasant things. No wonder even people like Blue Phoenix of the Five-Sylph Sect was full of praises when talking about you. Very well, you can't walk, and I can't walk either. We'll just have to spend the night over there under that cliff. I wonder whether we'll die today."

"If we survive today, I wonder whether we'll die tomorrow. If we survive tomorrow, I wonder whether we'll die the day after." Linghu Chong grinned.

"Drop it! You crawl over there slowly and I'll be right after you."

"But if you don't take this pill from the old monk, I am afraid I don't even have enough strength to crawl one step," Linghu Chong whined.

"You are talking nonsense again. If I don't take that pill, why are you the one having no strength to crawl?" the granny asked.

"This is definitely not nonsense. If you don't take the pill, your injury won't recover soon, and for sure you would not be in a mood to play the zither. Then I'd be all worried to death and where do you expect me to find strength to crawl over? I won't even have any strength to just lie here, much less crawling over," Linghu Chong explained.

"Even lying here requires your strength?" The granny chuckled.

"That's of course. This is a slope here. If I don't use my strength to hold myself still, I would have rolled all the way down it and fallen into the mountain gully down below. Then either I'll smash myself to pieces or drown."

"Even when you are so severely injured, not knowing whether you can make it till tomorrow, you are still in such a merrily mood to joke about. People as cheeky as this had to be rare in this world." The granny sighed.

Linghu Chong threw the pill back behind his back gently. "Will you just take it, please?" he pleaded

"Anyone who poses as a member of the reputable and orthodox schools can not be an good egg. If I take this pill of the Shaolin School, it will only dirty my mouth," the granny let out an irritated snort.

"Ouch!" Linghu Chong suddenly cried as he leaned his upper body to the left and then rolled toward the mountain gully down the slope.

"Look out!" astounded, the granny shouted.

Linghu Chong kept on rolling. The slop was not very steep, but very long. It took Linghu Chong a good while to finally roll to the edge of the gully. Spreading his arms and legs widely Linghu Chong stopped himself from rolling any further.

"Hey? Hello? Are you all right?" the granny shouted.

The sharp rocks along the slope gave Linghu Chong's face and arms quite some cuts and bruises, but he kept his silence in spite of the fierce pain.

"Fine! I'll take the old monk's stinking pill. Get...get back up here," the granny shouted again.

"You've said it. You can't go back to your words," Linghu Chong replied.

At the moment there was already quite a distance between the two. Linghu Chong didn't have any inner strength, so his voice couldn't reach very far. The granny only vaguely heard some indistinct sounds, but couldn't make out what he had said.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I...I...", Linghu Chong wanted to answer, but had to gasp for air.

“Hurry, come up here! I promise I’ll take the pill,” the granny shouted.

Linghu Chong tottered back onto his feet and tired to climb up the slope, but to roll down the slope was way much easier than climbing back up it again. Only after two steps, his leg suddenly gave out under him, and after some staggering, thump, he really fell into the mountain gully.

Seeing how Linghu Chong fell into the mountain gully from high above with a good view, the granny was stunned. Giving it no thought, she also rolled downward along the slope. When she finally rolled by Linghu Chong’s side, she reached out and grabbed onto his left ankle with her left hand. After taking in a few deep breaths, she clutched his back robe and then pulled a dripping-wet Linghu Chong out of the water.

By then Linghu Chong had swallowed many gulps of water and golden sparkles danced in front of his eyes. He shook his head slightly trying to pull himself together when suddenly he noticed the two inverted images reflected in the water: a young girl clutching his back robe tightly in her hand. Feeling very muddleheaded, he then heard the girl uttering a painful cry from behind his back, spilling a mouthful of warm blood onto the back of his neck. The girl bent over his back as though she had been paralyzed. Feeling the girl’s soft body leaning on his back and her long hair brushing against his face, Linghu Chong found himself at a loss, as though all his emotions had been emptied out of his heart. He took another look at the reflection in the water. Half of the girl’s face could be seen from the reflection in the water. Her eyes were shut tight, and her long eyelashes swayed in the breeze. Even though he could not see very clearly from the reflection in the water, he could still tell that she was a gorgeous-looking girl seventeen or eighteen years of age.

“Who is this girl? Why did a young girl suddenly come out of nowhere to rescue me?” he was deeply amazed. The



reflection in the water and the feeling on his back were both telling him that the girl had fainted. Linghu Chong wanted to turn around and prop the girl up, but his entire body felt weak, and he didn't even have enough strength to raise a finger. It felt as though he was in the middle of a dream. He gave another look at the graceful appearance in the reflection of the water and could not decide if he had arrived at a wonderland. All he could think was, "Am I dead already? Am I in heaven?"

A long while passed when the girl on his back finally came around.

"Were you just trying to scare me, or did you really... really want to kill yourself?" she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

As soon as Linghu Chong heard her voice, he almost jumped out of his skin. The voice he had just heard was completely identical to the voice of the granny. Shocked beyond description, he muttered, trembling, "You...you... you...."

"What? I just won't take the old monk's stinking pill. Go ahead, commit suicide and show me," the girl snapped.

"Granny, so you are a...a pretty, little...little girl!" Linghu Chong muttered.

"How did you know?" the girl screeched. "You...you promise-breaker! Have you peeped?"

As soon as she looked down and then saw a clear reflection in the mountain gully of herself leaning on Linghu Chong's back, her face turned completely scarlet, and she hurriedly struggled to stand up. But right after she straightened her back, her knees became weak and she fell right onto Linghu Chong's bosom. After a few frantic try to prop herself backup, which almost made her faint once more, she had to lay still.

Linghu Chong's heart was filled with puzzlement. "Why did you disguise as an elderly granny to fool me? Pretend to

be a senior master, and caused me...caused me..." he asked eagerly.

"Caused you what?" the girl asked.

The girl's cheek was only about a foot from Linghu Chong's eyes. Her skin was so white as though it was made out of crystal, and dimly showing a shade of flush beneath the skin.

"Caused me to call you granny this and granny that all the way. Humph, shame on you! You aren't even old enough to be my younger sister, yet you want to be my granny! If you want to be a granny, better wait at least another eighty years!"

"When did I ever say that I was a granny?" the girl chuckled. "It was you who wanted to call me granny. Didn't I get mad at you because you kept calling me 'Granny' just now? Told you to not call me that, but you just wouldn't listen. Am I right?"

Linghu Chong had to agree inwardly that these words were very true. But having been hoodwinked for so long and having acted like a complete fool on his part, he couldn't just let it go easily.

"You deceived me on purpose when you disallowed me from looking at your face. If I had looked at you face to face, would I have called you a granny? It even goes all the way back to the city of Luo Yang. Even back then you intentionally tricked me, colluding with Elder Bamboo-Green that old goat and asking him to call you auntie. He was already so old, and since you were his auntie, how can I not call you a granny?"

"Elder Bamboo-Green's Master calls my dad Uncle-Master, then what should Elder Bamboo-Green address me as?" The girl grinned.

Linghu Chong was taken by surprise. "Are you really Elder Bamboo-Green's auntie?" he asked hesitantly.

"That bloke Elder Bamboo-Green is not someone extraordinary. Why would I want to pretend to be his auntie?"

What's so great about been an auntie?"

"Well! I am so stupid. I should have already known." Linghu Chong heaved a sigh.

"Have already known what?" the girl asked, giggling.

"Your voice is so pleasant. How can there be any eighty-year old granny in this world with such a tender and melodious voice?"

"My voice is so coarse and hoarse, like the croaks of a crow. No wonder you thought I was an old granny," the girl said, beaming.

"Your voice is like the croaks of a crow? Wow, the world has really changed. So croaks of crows nowadays actually sound more pleasant than the singing of the orioles."

The girl knew that Linghu Chong was praising her. A quick flush shot across her cheeks as her heart thumped with joy.

"Alright, alright! Grandpa Linghu! Senior master Linghu! You've called me Granny for so long, now I'll call you back. Will that even it up for you? Are you happy now?" the granny reconciled.

"If you are Granny, and I am Grandpa, then we are the Grandpa and Granny. Aren't we...?" Linghu Chong said in a big grin.

He had always been the unrestrained and uninhibited type, having no scruples when he talked. He was just about to say "aren't we a couple then" when he suddenly noticed the knitted eyebrows and the angry look on the girl's face, so he shut up abruptly.

"What kind of nonsense are you talking about?" the girl growled.

"I said that if we are the Grandpa and Granny, aren't we...aren't we both senior masters of the Martial World?" Linghu Chong answered.

The girl knew very well that he had just gone out of his way to change his wording, but decided to not pursue the case, afraid that he might spill out even more coarse terms.

Learning on Linghu Chong's bosom and sensing the strong scent of a male in her nose, she had already felt great distractions in her heart. She really wanted to stand up, but her limbs simply would not comply. With a blushed face, she demanded, "Hey, give me a push!"

"Give you a push for what?" Linghu Chong asked.

"The way...the way we are...is very inappropriate," the girl said.

"It's appropriate for Grandpa and Granny," Linghu Chong grinned.

"If you keep talking rubbish, I'll kill you!" the girl yelled in a stern voice.

Linghu Chong felt a chill on his back as he remembered how she had made dozens of men cutting out their own eyes and then banished them to the Twine-Dragon Island in the East Sea, and he dared not making any more jokes. Then he remembered, "Even in such a young age, she was able to kill four apprentices of the Shaolin School with simply a raise of her hand. Such excellent Kung Fu skills combined with such ruthless conducts, it is so hard to believe that these traits all belonged to this delicately pretty girl right in front of my eyes."

"You are getting angry again, aren't you? You are a man, how come you are so intolerant?" receiving no answer from Linghu Chong, the girl spoke again.

"I am not angry. I am feeling afraid, afraid that you'll kill me," Linghu Chong answered.

"If you remain well-behaved from now on, why would I want to kill you?" The girl cackled.

"But I was born one with a nature of not behaving well, it's not like that I had a choice. I guess I am doomed to die in your hands." Linghu Chong sighed.

"When you were calling me Granny, you showed a lot of respect to me. That was good, very well behaved. Just keep that going and you'll be fine," the girl said with a snigger.

"No way! Once I know that you are a little girl, I can no longer regard you as a granny." Linghu Chong shook his head.

"What...what...?" the girl muttered, but suddenly she seemed to have thought of something; she blushed and shut her mouth.

Linghu Chong bent his neck slightly, and took in a good view of the girl's face. It was a beautiful face, so sweet and charming, still carrying the tender coyness of a young girl, prettier than anything else in the world. In an almost dreamlike state, he felt a slight tickle in his heart, and before he knew it, had already moved his head closer and kissed the girl gently on the cheek.

The girl was shocked, and out of nowhere, she suddenly found some strength inside her that wasn't there a minute ago. Turning her hand over, she slapped Linghu Chong heavily in the face, and immediately after, she sprang up. But the strength disappeared as abruptly as it had come; still in the midair, she found herself just as weak as a second ago, and a fraction of a second later, she fell back onto Linghu Chong's bosom once again, only this time she felt even feebler than the last time, and could no longer move a muscle.

"If you...if you do that again, I'll...kill you," afraid that Linghu Chong might take even more liberties with her and feeling utterly apprehensive, she muttered sternly.

"Whether you kill me or not, I have not much time left in this life, anyway, I think I'd rather do it again," Linghu Chong grinned.

"I...I...I...," the girl gasped in great worry, yet found herself at her wit's end.

After working hard to gather some strength, Linghu Chong propped the girl's shoulder slightly and then rolled away to the side.

"Whatcha gonna do?" he asked with a grin, but right after these words, he coughed violently and spilled out a few

mouthful of blood.

Having become enamored all of a sudden and kissed the girl, he regretted immediately. Then after getting hit on the face, even though he was still firm in speech, he knew he shouldn't have done so and dared not to stay close to her any longer.

Linghu Chong rolling away from her all of a sudden took the girl by great surprise. Seeing blood coming out of his mouth once again after he used his strength, she felt regretful secretly, but thin-skinned as she was, she could not bring herself to speak any of it.

"Your...your chest is hurting pretty bad, isn't it?" she finally asked gently.

"It's not my chest that's hurting, it's somewhere else," Linghu Chong replied.

"Where are you hurting then?" the girl asked hurriedly, her voice filled with concern.

"Here!" Linghu Chong stroked his cheek where the girl had slapped him.

"If you want me to apologize to you, alright, I am sorry." The girl smiled.

"It's my fault. Granny, will you please forgive me?" Linghu Chong said.

Hearing him calling her "Granny" again, the girl burst into giggles.

"Where's that stinking pill from the old monk? You never took it, did you?" Linghu Chong asked.

"I didn't have time to pick it up," the girl replied and then pointed at the top of the slope. "It's still up there." She paused for a second and then continued, "I'll listen to you and take it when we get back up there, and not think about the stinking part."

The two of them lay at the bottom of the slope and looked up. If it had been normal days, a simple leap would have gotten them up the slope, but now it looked almost like a ten-thousand-foot perilous peak that could never be

reached. After exchanging some stares between each other, both of them sighed at the same time.

"I'll mediate for a while. Don't interrupt me, alright?" the girl finally said.

"Alright!" Linghu Chong answered and then watched the girl leaning against the slope, closing her eyes, holding her thumb, index finger, and middle finger in a unique pose, and froze in a trance. "Even the way she meditate is so different from others. She didn't need to sit up with crossed legs at all."

He tried to calm himself and also take a rest, but the energy streams inside him rolled over and over and he could only struggle in vain. Suddenly a few croaks from a frog broke the stillness, and soon a corpulent frog hopped by him along the bank of the gully. Linghu Chong was delighted. After the much fuss over the last half a day, his stomach had been keen for some food, and now food had just hopped right next to him, how perfect! Wasting no time, he reached for the frog, but his aching and limp arm obviously not cooperating, and he missed the target. With another hop, the frog jumped away from him, croaking loudly as though it was quite pleased with the getaway and jeering at Linghu Chong for his incapability, which Linghu Chong returned with a sigh. But there turned out to be quite a few frogs along the gully, and soon another two frogs hopped by Linghu Chong, who still failed to catch either of them. Suddenly, a thin and delicate hand reached out by his waist and with an easy grip, caught the frog. After meditating for a while, the girl had regained her mobility. Although she still felt feeble and weary, it didn't pose any challenge for her to catch a few frogs.

"Wonderful! Wonderful! We can have a feast of frogs now!" Linghu Chong cheered, which the girl returned with a small grin. She went on catching more frogs, catching a frog with each stretch of her arm. Only a few moments later, she had already caught over twenty frogs.

"That's plenty! Will you please go collect some branches for the fire? I'll clean these frogs," Linghu Chong directed.

The girl went in compliance and soon returned with enough branches. Linghu Chong drew his long sword and began chopping the heads of the frogs off and cleaning out the internal organs.

"The ancients killed the chicken with a cattle knife,<sup>55</sup> and today our Big Hero Linghu kills frogs with the Dugu Nine Swords!" the girl said jokingly, and Linghu Chong broke into a loud laugh.

"If Big Hero Dugu could hear this in the underworld, knowing that his disciple was so unworthy, he had to be enraged to...." he stopped abruptly, thinking that Dugu Seeking-a-loss had been dead for many years, how could he have been enraged to death again?

"Big Hero Linghu....," the girl spoke again.

"I really don't deserve the name Big Hero. Where do you go find a Big Hero who slaughters frogs?" Linghu Chong shook his hand together with the dead frog in it.

"Well, there was a Dog-Butchering Champion<sup>56</sup> in the ancient times, why can't we have a Frog-Slaughtering Hero today?" the girl chuckled. "This Dugu Nine Swords of yours is marvelous. Even the old monk from the Shaolin School couldn't beat you. He said that the senior master named Feng, who taught you the sword art, is his benefactor. What was that about?"

"The senior master who taught me the sword art is a grandmaster of our Huashan School," Linghu Chong explained.

"This senior master's sword skills must have been almost magical. How come he is so nameless in the Martial World?" the girl asked.

"Well...well...I promised the grandmaster that I'll never let out his story and his whereabouts," Linghu Chong muttered.



"Humph, who cares? Even if you do tell me, what makes you think I'd be interested? Do you know who I am and what kind of backing I have?" the girl challenged.

"I don't know. I don't even know what's your name," Linghu Chong answered, shaking his head.

"You are holding things back from me, so I won't tell you, either!" the girl exclaimed.

"Although I don't know, I've figured most of it out," Linghu Chong replied.

"You figured it out? How did you figure it out?" The girl's face changed color slightly.

"Well, I am not a hundred percent sure yet, but it will be all crystal clear tonight."

"How would it be crystal clear tonight?" the girl couldn't help but ask, feeling even more surprised.

"I'll just look up in the sky and see which star is missing, then I'll know which goddess has decided to descend to the world. You are as beautiful as an angel, and angels don't come from the secular world."

"Bah!" the girl spit at him, blushing wildly, yet feeling immense pleasure inward. "You are talking nonsense again," she murmured gently.

By then, she had already lit the fire with the dead twigs and fuzz sticks. Stringing the already cleaned frogs onto a sharp stick, she roasted them above the bonfire. Frog grease dripped into the bonfire and made funny sounds as the wonderful smell of roasted frogs soon filled the air. Staring at the white smoke rising from the bonfire, she spoke gently.

"My name is 'Ying-Ying.' Now that I've told you, I wonder if you'll still remember it as days go by."

"Ying-Ying? That's a pretty name. If I had know that your name was Ying-Ying, I would never have called you Granny," Linghu Chong uttered.

"Why's that?" Ying-Ying asked.

"The name Ying-Ying obviously is the name of a little girl, then of course you can't have been an old granny."

"When I get old and really become an old granny, I wouldn't change my name. I'd still be called Ying-Ying," Ying-Ying smiled.

"You won't become an old granny. You are so pretty, even when you are eighty years old, you'll still be a very beautiful little girl."

"Wouldn't that make me a monster?" Ying-Ying beamed. She waited for a few seconds and then said with a serious face, "I've told you my name, but you are not allowed to use it to call me."

"Why?"

"You are just not allowed. I don't want you to."

Linghu Chong stuck his tongue out and made a face. "This is not allowed, and that is not allowed. Later whoever becomes your...." he muttered. Then at the sight of Ying-Ying pulling a long face, he quickly stopped, and Ying-Ying grunted heavily.

"Why are you getting angry again? I was saying that later whoever becomes your apprentice has gotten to be suffering some hardship." He had wanted to say "husband" at first, but after sensing trouble ahead, he quickly changed it to "apprentice."

Ying-Ying of course had a very good idea what he had wanted to say at the first place. "You are neither serious nor honest," she exclaimed. "Out of every three sentences of yours, there are at least two of them incoherent. I...I won't force anyone to do anything. If he likes to listen to my words, then he'll listen. If he doesn't, that's his choice."

"I like to listen to your words," Linghu Chong beamed at her. Even this sentence had some teasing elements in it.

Ying-Ying knitted her beautiful eyebrows in a straight line as though she was about to have a fit of anger, but suddenly her face turned scarlet and she turned her head away. For a good while, the both of them just set there, neither one said a word.

Suddenly, they smelled a terrible scent. Something was burning. "Oops!" Ying-Ying cried out when she realized that the burning smell had come from the string of frogs on the stick in her hands. They had been terribly scorched.

"This is all your fault!" she complained.

"You should have said that thanks to my joking with you and making you mad, you were finally able to make such splendid scorched frogs!" Linghu Chong grinned. Pulling a scorched frog off the stick, he tore the frog leg off and then gave it a good chew. "Delicious! Delicious! Only this degree of heating would be just right, adding a little bit of bitter into sweet, and then the sweet taste really comes out when the bitter wears out. This has gotten to be the most delicious food in the world!" he praised.

Amused, Ying-Ying broke into a giggle, and also started eating. Linghu Chong hurried and ate the most burnt frog meat and left the not too badly burnt part for her.

After the two of them finished the roasted frog meat, they lay down to the ground. Bathing in the warm sunshine of the afternoon, both of them were taken over by fatigue and before they knew it, they both closed their eyes and fell asleep.

Since both of them had stayed up through the previous night, and both had injuries, the nap was deep and sound for each of them. In his dream, Linghu Chong found himself practicing sword arts in the waterfall together with Yue Lingshan. But suddenly another man showed up, and it was Lin Pingzhi. Then he had a sword contest with Lin Pingzhi, but he had no strength in his arms, and when he tried hard to use techniques of the Dugu Nine Swords, he just couldn't remember any of it. Again and again, Lin Pingzhi stabbed him in his solar plexus, his stomach, his head, and his shoulders. Then he saw Yue Lingshan bursting into loud laughter. Feeling both shocked and infuriated, he shouted loudly, "Little apprentice sister! Little apprentice sister!" Only after a few cries, he woke up from the dream abruptly. Then

he heard a soft voice say, "Did you dream of your little apprentice sister? How was she treating you?"

"Someone wants to kill me. Little apprentice sister not only ignored me, but also...also laughed at me!" Linghu Chong said, his inside writhed with bitterness.

"You have sweat all over your forehead," Ying-Ying sighed and said tenderly.

Raising his arm, Linghu Chong wiped the sweat off with his sleeve. A cold breeze suddenly blew by him and he shivered. Then he noticed the star filled sky. It was at night already.

As soon as Linghu Chong regained his consciousness, he calmed down. Just when he was about to open his mouth and speak, Ying-Ying reached her hand out and covered his mouth.

"Someone is coming," she whispered.

Linghu Chong concentrated his attention and listened carefully. Sure enough, sounds of three men's footsteps rose from a distance.

"There are two more dead bodies," a while later, one of them spoke, and Linghu Chong recognized that to be Zu Qianqiu's voice.

"Ah, this one is a monk of the Shaolin School," another one uttered. It was Old Man who had just discovered Jue-Yue's body.

Ying-Ying slowly withdrew her hand, and then they heard Ji Wushi's voice.

"These three are also laymen apprentices of the Shaolin School. Why have they all died here? Oh, this man is Xin Guoliang. He was an elite fighter of the Shaolin School."

"Who could be so powerful, killing four elite fighters from the Shaolin School all at once?" Zu Qianqiu asked.

"Unless...unless it was someone from the Dark-Wood Cliff? Maybe it was Chief Dongfang, himself?" Old Man murmured haltingly.

"That could well be," Ji Wushi agreed. "We'd better bury these four bodies in a hurry, so people from the Shaolin School wouldn't find it out," he suggested.

"But if it were really someone from the Dark-Wood Cliff who had done this, they wouldn't be afraid of the Shaolin Temple finding out about this. Perhaps they had left these corpses here on purpose to put on a show of force," Zu Qianqiu speculated.

"If they had wanted to put on a show of force, they wouldn't have left these corpses in the middle of nowhere. If we weren't just happen to pass by here, these corpses would have been eaten by wild animals, and no one would have found out about it. When the Sacred Sun Moon Cult wanted to put on a show of force, most likely they would have hanged these corpses in the middle of the capital city and then marked clearly on the bodies that they are members of the Shaolin School to humiliate the Shaolin School." Ji Wushi said.

"I think you are right! Most likely when people from the Dark-Wood Cliff killed these four, they were in a hurry to pursue more enemies, and didn't have time to bury the bodies," Zu Qianqiu concurred.

Soon, sounds of digging rose as the three began to dig the ground with their weapons, ready to bury the bodies.

"These three men had to be somehow related to Chief Dongfang of the Dark-Wood Cliff, otherwise, they wouldn't have gone through so much trouble," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

Suddenly, Zu Qianqiu uttered a cry of surprise. "What's this? It's a healing pill," he said.

"This is the healing panacea of the Shaolin School. It has the power to return dead to life. I bet that it must have fallen out of a pocket of these Shaolin apprentices," Ji Wushi concluded after sniffing the pill a few times.

"How would you know?" Zu Qianqiu asked.

"Many years ago, I saw one just like this at an old monk from Shaolin," Ji Wushi explained.

"That's just wonderful. Brother Old, since this is a healing panacea, you can let your daughter Not-Dead take this and it will cure her disease," Zu Qianqiu suggested.

"Well, my daughter's fate would only be the second priority. We should hurry to find Young Master Linghu and let him take this pill," Old Man replied, which made Linghu Chong feeling utterly grateful.

"That's the pill Ying-Ying dropped earlier. How can I ask for it back from Old Man, so she could take it?" he thought over.

He turned his head and looked at Ying-Ying. Under the dim moonlight, Ying-Ying grinned at him. She suddenly made a face, looking almost childlike, bearing a most charming smile on her lips. It was so hard to believe that she had just killed four master hands from the Shaolin School not too long ago. Then he heard the sounds of the three filling the grave they just dug up with rocks and soil to cover up the corpses.

"There's a big problem though. Night Owl, help me think here," Old Man muttered.

"What problem?" Ji Wushi asked.

"Right now, Young Master Linghu must be together with...with the Sacred Lady. If I bring the pill over, I'll bump into the Sacred Lady inevitably. It's all right if the Sacred Lady kills me out of annoyance, but for sure she would have felt very offended and displeased, and that would not be a good thing." Old man murmured.

"So they are referring you as the Sacred Lady, and are just completely fearful of you. Why are you so apt to kill people?" casting a glance at Ying-Ying, Linghu Chong thought to himself.

"Well, I think those three blind men we saw on the road could be very useful then. We'll catch up with those three and ask them to deliver the pill to Young Master Linghu. Since they are blind already, even when they find Young

Master Linghu together with the Sacred Lady, it wouldn't end up a fatal disaster," Ji Wushi replied.

"But I suspect that their eyes were cut out because they saw the Sacred Lady together with Young Master Linghu," Zu Qianqiu added.

"That's got to be it!" Old Man struck his own thigh and uttered. "If not, why would three perfectly fine men suddenly went blind? I bet you these four Shaolin apprentices must have had the same kind of misfortune of bumping into the Sacred Lady and Young Master Linghu."

At that word, the trio fell silent, and Linghu Chong finding himself with more doubts and suspicious. Then he heard Zu Qianqiu spoke again after a sigh.

"I just hope Young Master Linghu would have a speedy recovery from his injury, so the Sacred Lady can make a happy loving couple with him soon. As long as they are not married, there is no peace in the Martial World."

Linghu Chong was astounded. He sneaked a peek toward Ying-Ying. Under the dim night-light, he could vaguely make out a scarlet face and a pair of bright eyes, which blazed with irritation. Afraid that Ying-Ying would leap out and hurt the three, he extended his right hand and then held onto her left hand gently. He could feel that Ying-Ying's entire body was shaking wildly, but he could not tell if it was because of rage or shyness.

"Who would have thought the Sacred Lady would get so mad at us for our gathering on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge," Zu Qianqiu went on. "Alas, a man and a woman finding themselves in a passion of love is really the most natural thing, and for someone like Young Master Linghu, an exceptional young hero so unrestrained and benevolent, only a girl as beautiful as the Sacred Lady would be suitable as the counterpart. Why would the Sacred Lady, someone so marvelous, act so bashful like any other vulgar girl? She obviously likes Young Master Linghu very much, yet would

not allow anyone to mention that, or to see that together. Wouldn't that have been...been a bit unreasonable?"

"Really? I wonder if these words of his are true or not," Linghu Chong thought.

Suddenly, he felt a strong jerk from Ying-Ying's hand in his palm, trying to break free of his grip. He immediately grabbed even tighter, very afraid that Ying-Ying would kill the three of them instantly out of fury.

"Although the Sacred Lady enjoys exceptional status on the Dark-Wood Cliff, even Chief Dongfang never defied her wish, she is just a young girl after all," Ji Wushi said. "When a young girl falls in love with someone the very first time in her life, even though she likes him so very much in her heart, she would still feel very shy and sensitive about it. This time when we tried to fawn on her, though we had good intention, we still made her very displeased. Too bad that all of us are crude fellows and had no idea about young girls' feelings. There were a few dozen girls and ladies on the Five-Tyrant Ridge, but unfortunately, their dispositions were not that different from any man. The Five-Tyrant Ridge get-together, the brownnosing the Sacred Lady did not like. When this episode gets out, those bastards from the orthodox schools are going to laugh their ass off."

"The Sacred Lady has done us great favor, and all of us are grateful to her and only wanted to seek ways to repay her kindness by curing her lover's injury. A true man remembers his gratitude and his grudges; to a benefactor he pays a debt of gratitude, and to an enemy, he seeks his revenge. What's wrong with that? If any bastard dares to laugh at us, I'll skin him alive," Old Man declared solemnly.

By then, Linghu Chong finally understood. The so many people flattering and fawning on him along his way did so all for the sake of this Sacred Lady named Ying-Ying. And the over one thousand people breaking up a hubbub and leaving in a hurry on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge was also because the Sacred Lady didn't want any others to know her feelings



and became very displeased when this was made widely known in the entire Martial World. Then he thought of something else: If this Sacred Lady, such a young girl, could make so many fellows of the Martial World to fawn on him, she had to be a world-shaking figure in the Demon's Cult. According to Ji Wushi, even Dongfang Invincible, the one known as the "Number One in the Martial World" never defied her wishes. Linghu Chong was only a nobody in the Martial World, and happened to made her acquaintance by learning the zither from her with a curtain in between at a small alley in the Luoyang city. There was never any feeling of love involved. Could it be that Elder Bamboo-Green had misunderstood it and let the rumor out, which made the Sacred Lady very angry? Then he heard Zu Qianqiu's voice again.

"Old Man said it right. The Sacred Lady granted us great favor and kindness. If there is anything we can do to help to bring them together and make her happy all her life, even if we have to have our body smashed to pieces, we will die with nothing to regret. Being snubbed on the Five-Tyrant Ridge is really nothing. But...but Young Master Linghu is the Head Apprentice of the Huashan School, which is at daggers drawn with the Dark-Wood Cliff. I am afraid that there will probably be many obstacles to overcome before this marriage would work out."

"I've gotten an idea. Why don't we take Yue Buqun, the Head Master of the Huashan School, hostage, and then at knife's point, coerce him into upholding this marriage?" Ji Wushi suggested.

"That's an wonderful idea, Night Owl!" Zu Qianqiu and Old Man cheered together. "There's no time to lose. Let's set off right now for the capture of Yue Buqun," they said.

"But that Mr. Yue is the Head Master of a renown school. He must have great attainments in both the inner energy department and the sword art department. If we fight him, firstly, we don't have a sure win, and secondly, even if we do

catch him, I am sure he would rather die than submit. What are we gonna do then?" Ji Wushi asked.

"Then we'll just have to kidnap his wife and daughter to add pressure for him," Old Man replied.

"I agree! But we must do everything in secret, and not let anyone else know about it to make Huashan School lose face. Young Master Linghu would for sure be very displeased if he ever finds out that we have offended his Master," Zu Qianqiu added.

In the next moment, the three began discussing details as to how they could kidnap Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan.

"Hey, you three reckless chaps, get out of here right now and stop bothering me!" Ying-Ying suddenly spoke, her voice loud and clear.

Seeing her opening her mouth and speak all of a sudden, Linghu Chong was stunned. He held her hand with an even tighter grip. Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, and Old Man were simply thunderstruck.

"Yes, yes...I...I...I...." Old Man muttered, but after saying the word "I" three times, the terror started to sink in, and he froze.

"Yes, yes, your highness! We were only talking nonsense. The Sacred Lady will not take that seriously. We'll head straight to the Western Regions tomorrow and never return to the Central Plains," Ji Wushi muttered.

"That's three more who have just been banished for life," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

"Who asked you to go to the Western Region? I have something I'd like the three of you handle for me," getting back onto her feet, Ying-Ying said coldly.

"The Sacred Lady speaks the word, and we'll do it with all our heart," the trio replied in unison, each feeling overjoyed.

"I want to kill a person, but could not find him right away. You can spread the word out: whoever kills this man will be guaranteed a handsome reward from me," Ying-Ying instructed.

“We really don’t deserve any reward. If the Sacred Lady wants this person dead, even if the three brothers of us have to chase him to the end of the world, we’ll find him and kill him. May I ask the Sacred Lady the name of the stupid scoundrel who was so audacious to offend the Sacred Lady?” Zu Qianqiu asked.

“With only the three of you, you would not have enough eyes and ears to trace him. You must spread the word to the entire Martial World immediately,” Ying-Ying ordered.

“Yes, yes, your highness,” the three replied all together.

“Get on to it, then,” Ying-Ying demanded.

“Yes, your highness. Will the Sacred Lady please inform us which daring rascal does she wish to kill?” Zu Qianqiu asked.

“This person’ surname is Linghu and his name is Chong. He is an apprentice of the Huashan School.” Ying-Ying let out an irritated snort.

These words struck Linghu Chong, Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, and Old Man like thunderbolts, and none of them knew what to say. A good while later, Old Man finally managed to mumble a few words out of this mouth, “That...that....”

“What about that? Are you afraid of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance and have not the courage to touch an apprentice of the Huashan School?” Ying-Ying snapped in a stern voice.

“When we serve the Sacred Lady, even the Jade Emperor<sup>57</sup> or the Lord of the Underworld can be subject to our wrath, much less the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. We’ll try to capture Linghu...Linghu Chong and bring him to the Sacred Lady’s judgment. Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, let’s go,” Ji Wushi answered.

“Young Master Linghu must have somehow offended the Sacred Lady in their conversations,” Old Man thought to himself. “The more intimate a young couple are, the easier they are at odds with each other. Many years ago when Not-Dead’s mom and I loved each other so deeply like honey

mixed with oil, didn't we also quarrel and fight everyday? Alas, if it weren't because I punched Not-Dead's mom so hard on the stomach when she still had the baby inside her that had messed up the pregnancy, Not-Dead the girl wouldn't have gotten the disease before she was even born. I guess I'll have no choice but to invite Young Master Linghu to see the Sacred Lady and let her deal with him, herself."

Just when Old Man was still in the middle of wild flights of thoughts, Ying-Ying bellowed, "Who asked you to capture him? Every minute this Linghu Chong stays alive will only add more stains my unblemished reputation. The earlier he is killed, the earlier I can vent my resentment."

"Your highness...", Zu Qianqiu stumbled over his words.

"I see. You've developed good friendship with Linghu Chong and simply don't want to handle this for me. That's fine. I'll ask somebody else to spread the word," Ying-Ying said with chill in her tone.

Noticing the graveness in her voice, the three had no choice but to bow in compliance. "Your command is our wish, your highness!" they replied in unison.

But Old Man thought to himself, "Young Master Linghu is a man with kindheartedness and justice. Today I have an order from the Sacred Lady and have no choice but to kill him. But after I do so, I shall commit suicide to accompany him on his way to the underworld." He took the pill out from his chest pocket and then placed it on the ground.

The three of them turned around and set off. Gradually, their receding figures grew more distant and eventually merged into the dark shades of the night.

Linghu Chong cast a sideways look at Ying-Ying, finding her contemplating silently with her head down. "She wants me dead in order to preserve her reputation. How hard could that be?" he thought to himself.

"If you want me dead, you can just take care of it yourself. Why stir up so many people?" Linghu Chong asked

as he unsheathed his long sword slowly, turning it and then handed it over, sword handle first.

Taking the long sword, Ying-Ying turned her head slightly and then fixed her stare at Linghu Chong, who straightened his back and burst into a laugh.

"Your end is imminent. Why are you still laughing?" Ying-Ying asked.

"That's exactly why I am laughing - my end is finally coming," Linghu Chong replied.

Raising the long sword, Ying-Ying recoiled her arm in an attacking posture, ready to strike out, but suddenly she turned on her heels and with a strong wave of her arm, threw the long sword in the air. The blade shined profoundly from the reflection of the dim starlight as it flew across the darkness, and with a clank, fell to the ground in a distance.

"It's all your fault!" Ying-Ying stamped her feet on the ground hysterically. "It's all your fault that so many people are laughing at me, as though that nobody...nobody will ever want me for the rest...the rest of my life, and I am trying every possible way to make you like me. What...what's so terrific about you? How can I ever see another person without feeling ashamed of myself?"

Linghu Chong let out another laugh.

"And you are still laughing at me? Mocking me?" Ying-Ying yelled heatedly. Suddenly, with a loud cry, she broke down in tears.

Linghu Chong immediately felt sorry as tender affections rising in his heart. He suddenly came to realization. "She has very high status in the Martial World, with the many people always holding her in awe and veneration. Then of course she has a very sensitive pride. Besides, she is a girl, and girls are always born shy. Now when suddenly everybody says that she fell in love with me, it's only natural that she becomes very displeased. She told Old Man and the rest to spread the word only to refute a rumor. She didn't really want me dead. Once everyone hears what she said, of course no one would

believe that we are a couple, and the rumor would have no ground."

At that thought, he spoke softly, "It is really my fault, causing damage to your clean name, Miss! I'll be on my way. Goodbye."

"Where are you going?" Ying-Ying wiped the tears off her eyes with her sleeve and asked.

"Anywhere my legs bring me to," Linghu Chong answered.

"But you promised to escort me. How can you just walk away like that?"

"I must have had an inflated opinion of my abilities to say words like that. I've really made a fool out of myself in front of you, Miss. With such outstanding Kung Fu skills you really have no need for any protection. Even one hundred Linghu Chong putting together would be no match for you," Linghu Chong answered with a smile, and as soon as the last word left his mouth, he had already turned on his heels to walk away.

"You can't go!" Ying-Ying yelled hastily.

"Why is that?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Zu Qianqiu and the other two have already set out to spread the word out. It will only take a few days for it to become publicly known. Then everybody will be on your heels trying to kill you. It will be like walking on thorns every step of the way. You wouldn't be able to escape the fatal disaster even if you are perfectly fit, much less when you are so badly injured."

"Linghu Chong dying from Miss's words, that's fine," Linghu Chong grinned indifferently.

He walked over to pick up the long sword on the ground and then shoved it back into its sheath. Feeling pretty sure that he would not be able to climb up the slope, he decided to walk alongside the mountain gully.

"Hey, stop! You!" seeing that Linghu Chong was walking further and further, Ying-Ying ran after him, shouting.

"It will only bring you trouble if Linghu Chong stays with Miss. It will be much better if I leave by myself," Linghu Chong said.

"You...you...", Ying-Ying muttered, biting her lip hard, feeling the distraction growing inside her by the second. Seeing that Linghu Chong simply would not stop walking away, she ran a few steps closer and then uttered, "Linghu Chong, you just want to force me to say it myself, don't you?"

"What? I don't understand?" Linghu Chong asked in surprise.

Ying-Ying bit her lip again and finally said, "I asked Zu Qianqiu and the group to spread the word, because I want you...I want you to stay by my side forever, and never leave me." After these words, she trembled so frantically as though she could collapse any moment.

"You...you want to be with me?" Linghu Chong stood in amazement.

"Yes! After Zu Qianqiu and the other two spread the word out, you can only stay alive if you stay by my side. Who would have thought you didn't care about your life any bit and were not afraid at all. Wouldn't that...wouldn't that have done you for good?"

"So you do care for me very much, but just wouldn't admit any of it in front of those other fellows," Linghu Chong thought to himself as a stream of gratitude washed over him.

He turned around and walked next to her, holding both of her hands into his own. Ying-Ying's hands were icy cold; Linghu Chong could feel that both her palms were covered in cold sweats.

"Your hands are cold." Linghu Chong said gently.

"I am afraid," Ying-Ying answered.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid this fool right here won't listen to me and would rather risk his life out there. I am afraid that you might not even make it to the end of tomorrow and end up dying under those worthless, rotten lowlifes' murderous hands."

"They are all courageous and straightforward guys who respect you very much. Why do you despise them so much?" Linghu Chong sighed.

"They laugh at me behind my back and they want to kill you. Wouldn't that make them rotten lowlifes?" Ying-Ying argued.

"But it was you who had ordered them to kill me. How can you blame this on them?" Linghu Chong could not hold his grin back. "Moreover, they never laughed at you behind your back? Remember when Ji Wushi, Old Man, and Zu Qianqiu mentioned in their conversation, how respectful they were in their tones? What made you think they were laughing at you behind your back?"

"They weren't laughing on their faces, but they were laughing in their guts."

Hearing the girl persist unreasonably, Linghu Chong found it hard to refute, so he said, "All right! If you don't allow me to leave, I'll stay here and be your company. Alas, it probably wouldn't feel that great to be chopped into pieces."

"Wouldn't feel great? You'll feel awful," Ying-Ying replied, feeling wild with joy to hear Linghu Chong agree to stay.

She turned her face to the side when she spoke these words, and illuminated under the dim starlight of the night, the snow-white face seemed to be glowing in a soft radiance. Linghu Chong felt a tickle in his heart.

"This girl in fact is much more beautiful than the little apprentice sister, and she treats me with great care and affection. But...but...why couldn't I forget little apprentice sister even for a single moment?" he thought to himself.

But Ying-Ying had no idea that he was thinking of Yue Lingshan. "Where's the zither I gave you? You lost it, didn't you?" she said.

"That's right! I ran out of money on the way, so I pawned the zither in the pawnshop for some silver," Linghu Chong answered as he took off the pack on his back, opened it, and then took out the short zither.



Ying-Ying could see the tight wrap around the zither in the pack. Knowing that Linghu Chong had always treasured this present from hers, she was very pleased.

"How many lies do you have to make everyday to make yourself happy?" she reproved.

Getting the zither from Linghu Chong, she gave a few plucks to the strings, and then began playing that "Song of Peace and Serenity."

"Have you learned the entire piece yet?" she asked.

"Far from that!" Linghu Chong answered.

Quietly, he listened to the gentler zither sounds, feeling relaxed and joyful. After a while, he noticed that the notes of music were quite different from the ones she had played in the Bamboo-Green Alley in Luoyang. Now they almost sounded like chirps from birds on top of the branches or spurt from mountain strings, with continuous jingles and tinkles, sounding very interesting and pleasant.

"Same melody, but different notes. So this 'Song of Peace and Serenity' can have so many variations," he thought.

Suddenly a loud ring echoed as the shortest string of the zither broke in half. Ying-Ying frowned but continued to play. But only minutes later, another string snapped. Linghu Chong could sense much fidgety carried in the zither play, which were totally contrary to the intention the music was supposed to depict. Before he had any success to think it through, another crack echoed as a third string snapped in half.

"You sit right next to me and keep disturbing me. How can I play the zither well like that?" Pushing the zither aside, Ying-Ying protested.

"I've been sitting here very quietly since the beginning. When did I ever disturb her?" Linghu Chong thought to himself. But he figured it out right away. "So she could not find peace of mind and she is blaming that on me."

He didn't even try to argue, and simply lay down on the meadow in repose with his eyes closed. Soon his fatigue

caught up with him and before he knew it, he had fell asleep.

By the time he woke again, it was already the next day. He looked around and then found Ying-Ying washing her face on her knees by the mountain gully. He watched on as Ying-Ying began combing her hair after she finished washing her face. The skin on her arms was so white as though the arms were made out of pure jade, and the beautiful long hair almost touched the ground. The picture was so beautiful that Linghu Chong forgot about everything else and just sat there, watching in a daze.

Ying-Ying looked back over her shoulder and then blushed when she found Linghu Chong gazing at her in a trance.

"Lazy bum! Getting up so late!" she grinned.

"I'll go catch some frogs. Let's see if I've build up enough strength," feeling quite embarrassed to be caught gazing at her, Linghu Chong uttered awkwardly.

"Why don't you stay lying down and rest some more? I'll go catch some," Ying-Ying suggested.

Linghu Chong struggled to get back onto his feet, but all his limbs were sore and limp, and the energy streams inside him seethed the moment he tried to use his strength.

"Either let me die or let me live," Linghu Chong thought to himself, feeling very irritated. "Staying half dead and half alive like this, I am pretty much a good-for-nothing. Even I am disgusted with myself, not mentioning how others would think of me as a complete nuisance."

"Your internal injuries might not be so hard to heal. This is a very secluded area. We have nothing else, anyway. You can just let time take it's course and let the wounds heal slowly. There's no need to be impatient," noticing the displeased expression on Linghu Chong's face, Ying-Ying comforted him.

The valley the gully flow through was located in a remote section of the mountain range. Ever since the night when Ji Wushi and the rest of the group passed by, no one else ever

showed up. The two of them lived in the valley for almost a fortnight. Ying-Ying's internal wounds had healed early on, and every day she would pick wild fruit and catch wild frogs for food, but Linghu Chong only became thinner and thinner as days go by. She forced him to take the pill left by Great Master Fang-Sheng, and played the zither for him everyday to help him fall asleep, but these did not seem to have an effect on his injuries. Linghu Chong knew that his final day would be coming soon, but having always been open-minded all his life, he did not let that bother him, and kept talking and joking with Ying-Ying every day. Although Ying-Ying had always been arrogant and willful before, at the thought that Linghu Chong could be suddenly gone any moment now, she became even more gentle and soft, docile and obedient, and attended upon Linghu Chong with all her heart. Even at times when she got angry over trifles occasionally, she would immediately regret it and apologize to him.

One day after eating two peaches, Linghu Chong was exhausted already, and soon, he fell asleep. In the ooze, he heard the sound of somebody sobbing. Opening his eyes slightly, he found Ying-Ying bending over by his side sobbing uncontrollably. Stunned, Linghu Chong was just about to ask the reason for her grief when he stumbled across the answer, "She knows that I am dying. That's why she is so grieved."

"Don't cry! Don't cry! I can live for at least another eighty years. I am not leaving this world in any hurry," reaching out his left hand, he stroked her beautiful hair and said with a forced smile.

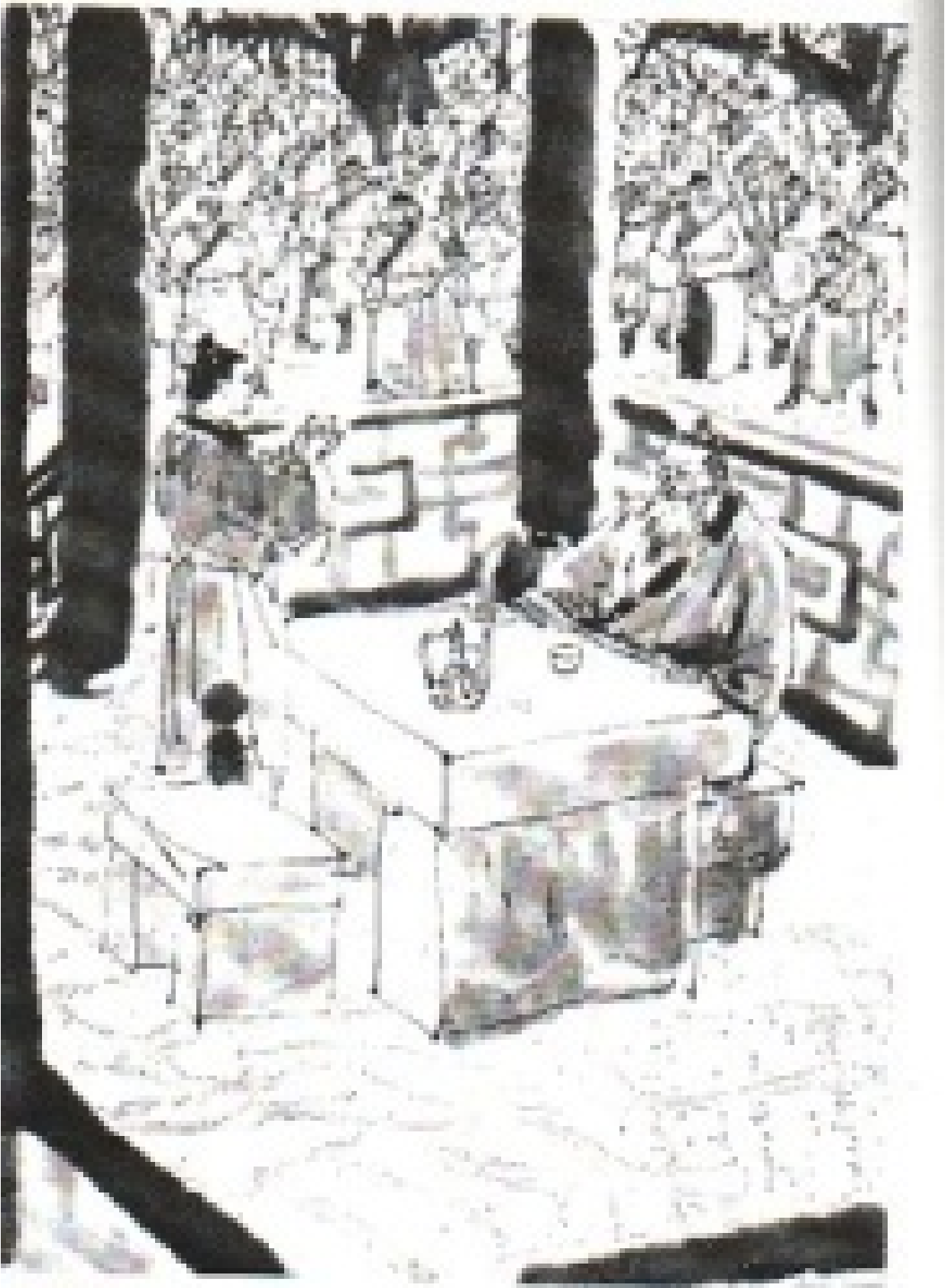
"You are getting thinner and thinner every day. I...I...I don't want to live anymore...," Ying-Ying whimpered.

Linghu Chong could feel the utter sincerity and deep sorrow in her voice, and immense gratitude immediately filled his heart. A strong surge of warmth suddenly shot up his throat, and blood immediately gushed out of his mouth. The entire world seemed to have started to swirl around him, and before he knew it, he lost consciousness.



# **Chapter 18: Collaboration**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**The old man turned his head back and glared at Linghu Chong coldly. With a trace of surprise shown on his face, he snorted. Linghu Chong raised his cup. "Please!" he said.**

During the next many days, Linghu Chong remained in a coma. Occasionally, he would regain slight consciousness, feeling as though his body was drifting high in the clouds, before slipping right back into the coma only moments later. Sometimes, it felt as if someone was forcing water down his throat, while some other times, he felt as though his entire body had been roasted on fire. Not only couldn't he move a muscle in his arms or legs, he didn't even have any strength to open his eyes.

Then, one day, when he was finally in his right mind, he felt someone grabbing tightly around his wrists and infusing two streams of burning hot energy into his body, each through an acupoint on one of his wrist. And instantly, they clashed and collided fiercely with the streams of energy already inside his body. Feeling the ineffable pain, he opened his mouth and cry out loud, yet no sound came out of it, while the pain only worsened as though he was experiencing the combination of all tortures known to mankind at the same time.

This went on and on. In his ooze, Linghu Chong didn't know how many days passed by like that; all he knew was that every time after more inner energy was infused inside him, the excruciating pain and suffering would reduce slightly compared to the last time. Eventually his brain began to function normally once again and it didn't take him long to figure out that someone with very resourceful inner power must have been working on him, curing his internal injuries.

"Could Master and Master-Wife have found a senior grandmaster to save my life?" he thought, "But where did Ying-Ying go? And where are Master and Master-Wife? How about little apprentice sister?" As soon as the thought of little

apprentice sister came into his mind, the energy flow in his chest seethed hysterically, and he lost consciousness instantaneously.

Thus everyday, someone came and infused more inner energy into his body, and at last the day came when he was much more clear-headed and was able to open his mouth to speak.

"Many...many thanks to the senior master! Where... where am I?"

He opened his eyes slowly, and then took in the glimpse of a much-crinkled face, which smiled gently at him. This face looked very familiar. Still in a daze, Linghu Chong gazed at him to take a better look, and before long he noticed that there was no hair on the man's head, only burning scars from incense sticks<sup>58</sup> – the man was a Buddhist monk. The indistinct image of a man came to his mind.

"You...you are Great...Great Master...Fang," he muttered.

"Very good! Very good! You can recognize me now. I am Fang-Sheng," the old monk replied in a smile, looking utterly gratified.

"Yeah, yeah! You are Great Master Fang-Sheng," Linghu Chong repeated.

By then, he had just realized that he was inside a small room. A small oil lamp on the table lit the room with dim yellowish glow, and he was lying on bed under a cotton-padded quilt.

"How do you feel?" Fang-Sheng asked.

"I feel better now. Where...where am I?" Linghu Chong asked.

"You are inside the Shaolin Temple," Fang-Sheng answered.

"I...I am inside the Shaolin Temple? Where's Ying-Ying? How did I come to the Shaolin Temple?" Linghu Chong asked in amazement.

"You have only regained your consciousness a moment ago. It would be wise to restrain your thoughts so as to not



exhaust yourself and to avoid any possibility of relapse. Everything can wait till later.” Fang-Sheng smiled.

Henceforth, Fang-Sheng would come to the small room everyday to work on Linghu Chong’s injuries using his own inner energy, once in the morning and once in the evening. A fortnight later, Linghu Chong was already able to sit up and eat, drink without any help. But every time when he asked about the whereabouts of Ying-Ying and how he had ended up in the temple, Fang-Sheng would not answer but only smile.

One day, after Fang-Sheng had infused his inner energy into Linghu Chong’s body, he said, “Young hero Linghu, by now, your life has been temporarily preserved, but the old monk’s Kung Fu is only limited and still could not dissolve the heterogeneous energy streams inside your body. At the moment any deferral would count as a gain. But I am afraid that within the period of one year, your internal injuries would have a relapse, and by then, even the Buddha, himself, would not be able to save you.”

“Ping One-Finger, Dr. Ping, told me the same thing that very day. Great Master has done his utmost to cure me, and I can never be thankful enough to what Great Master has done for me. The lifespan of any man is his destiny. Even if Great Master had greater inner energy, you wouldn’t have been able to turn Heaven’s will.” Linghu Chong nodded.

“We members of the Buddhist order only believe in Karma, not Heaven’s will.” Fang-Sheng shook his head. “I’ve already told you that day when we first met that the Abbot of our temple, senior apprentice brother Fang-Zheng, has profound inner power. If he finds you a part of his Karma and is willing to teach you the secret of the Tendon-Altering Sutra, then even one’s tendons and muscles can be altered, much less dissolving heterogeneous energy inside. I’ll bring you to pay a formal visit to the Abbot. I hope you will answer him wisely.”

Linghu Chong had long heard of the grand name of the Shaolin Temple Abbot, Great Master Fang-Zheng. "Thank you very much for introducing me, Great Master," he said joyously. "Even if it's not in my Karma for Great Master Abbot to look upon me with favor, just being able to pay a visit to this accomplished hierarch of the present age is already good luck that is hard to come by."

Slowly, he got off the bed, dressed himself, and then followed Great Master Fang-Sheng out of the small room.

As soon as he stepped out of the small room, he was bathed in the warm and dazzling sunshine. It almost felt as though he had just entered into another world, and his spirit soared. Still feeling sore and limp in his legs, he walked in slow paces and looked around along the way. The temple had many hall buildings, and each of the hall buildings looked majestic and magnificent. They met many monks on their way, and every time far before they even got there, those monks would move out of the way and bow to Fang-Sheng with their palms together in a Buddhist greeting, holding him in reverence and sticking to etiquette. After walking through three long corridors, they arrived outside a stone building.

"Fang-Sheng requests an audience with apprentice brother Abbot," Fang-Sheng said to the young Buddhist novice standing outside of the building.

The young Buddhist novice went inside to report and soon returned.

"Abbot is happy to have your presence," he said, putting his palms together in greeting.

Linghu Chong followed Fang-Sheng and entered the building. Then a short, old monk sitting on a cattail hassock in the middle caught his attention.

"Fang-Sheng here shows his respect to apprentice brother Abbot, and I'd like you to meet the Head Apprentice of the Huashan School, young hero Linghu Chong," Fang-Sheng bowed and saluted.

Linghu Chong knelt down on his knees right away and kowtowed respectfully. Abbot Fang-Zheng raised himself slightly and extended his right arm in greeting.

“Young hero, no need for excessive courtesy. Please sit down.”

After Linghu Chong finished kowtowing, he took a seat on the cattail hassock to the right of Fang-Sheng and shot another glance at Abbot Fang-Zheng. The man had a thin face with a kind and amiable look, which gave no indication as to how old the man really was.

“Who would have thought that this so well-known hierarch looks so mediocre? Without prior knowledge, who would have believed that he turns out to be the Head Master of the Number One martial arts school in the entire Martial World?” Linghu Chong thought to himself secretly. Then he heard Great Master Fang-Sheng’s voice.

“After the last three months of nursing and nourishing, young hero Linghu is feeling much better now.”

“Did I stay in a coma for over three months? I thought it was only twenty some days.” Linghu Chong thought to himself, feeling astounded.

“Excellent,” Fang-Zheng replied. Turning his head toward Linghu Chong, he said, “Young hero Linghu, your respectful master Mr. Yue, the Head Master of the Huashan School, is an upright man who never stoop to flattery. His clean fame is well known to the entire Martial World. I’ve always admired him very much.”

“Thank you for your kind words!” Linghu Chong stood up and bowed. “I had been unconscious due to my severe injuries, and I owe a great debt of gratitude to Great Master Fang-Sheng for saving my life. But I had no idea that three month have passed. May I ask you if my Master and Master-Wife are well?”

Even though that he shouldn’t have asked an outsider about the well being of his own Master and Master-Wife,

feeling very concerned about them, he still couldn't help but ask.

"I heard that Mr. Yue, Madam Yue, and the Huashan apprentices are in the Fujian Province at this moment," Fang-Zheng replied.

"Many thanks, Great Master Abbot!" Linghu Chong felt relieved right away. But then immediately after, a feeling of sadness welled up in this heart. "So Master and Master-Wife have brought little apprentice sister to apprentice brother Lin's home at last," he thought to himself.

"Young hero Linghu, please sit down," Fang-Zheng said gently. "Apprentice brother Fang-Sheng told me that young hero showed most excellent sword art skills and has truly mastered the skills taught by Grandmaster Feng of Huashan. That is so gratifying."

"You flatter me," Linghu Chong answered.

"Grandmaster Feng has lived in seclusion for many years. I had thought that the venerable grandmaster had passed away. It is such pleasure to hear that he is still with us in this world," Fang-Zheng said.

"Yes!" Linghu Chong acknowledged.

"Young hero, after you had your injuries, your healer had gone about the wrong way in curing you, leaving the many conflicting energy streams inside you that can not be easily dissolved. Apprentice brother Fang-Sheng has explained all these to me. After careful consideration, I came to realization that only after you begin training in the secret Kung Fu of our school, the Tendon Altering Sutra, will you be able to use your own internal power to dissolve them gradually. If we use any external source of inner energy and force it upon young hero's body, it would be like drinking poison to quench thirst and cause more suffering. For the last three months, apprentice brother Fang-Sheng used his own inner energy to extend your life. But after he infused his inner energy into your body, he had only added another heterogeneous energy

stream inside you. If you try gathering your inner energy, you'll see what I mean."

Linghu Chong gave it a try, and just as Fang-Zheng had said, he immediately felt waves of inner energy surging inside his lower stomach, clash with each other, completely out of his control. Agonizing pain soon swept over him, his body trembling wildly as cold sweats streamed down his forehead.

"The old Buddhist monk is so incompetent and only caused young hero more pain and suffering," Fang-Sheng said apologetically, putting his palms together.

"Please don't say that, Great Master," Linghu Chong replied hurriedly. "For my well being, you worked with all your heart and did everything you could do, exhausting precious inner energy of your own that took a long time to cultivate. I have only been granted a new lease of life thanks to Great Master's kindness."

"I really don't deserve that," said Fang-Sheng. "Grandmaster Feng granted me great benevolence many years ago. What I did couldn't even repay a fraction of my debt of gratitude to Grandmaster Feng."

At these words, Fang-Zheng held up his head.

"Why haven't you ascended the meanings of benevolence and rancor? Benevolence is Karma while rancor is also Karma. Rancor should not be persisted in while benevolence need not be persisted in, either. All things in the mortal world are as transient as a fleeting cloud. There is no benevolence or rancor after death."<sup>59</sup>

"Yes, many thanks for the advice, senior apprentice brother," Fang-Sheng answered.

"We members of the Buddhist order believe that compassion is the principle of life, so with the knowledge of young hero's internal injuries, we will aid to the best we can," Fang-Zheng said slowly. "The divine art of the Tendon Altering Sutra was written by the venerable Bodhidharma,<sup>60</sup> the First Ancestor of the Zen Sect of Mahayana in the East

Region, and inherited by the Second Ancestor of the Zen sect, Great Master Hui-Ke. Great Master Hui-Ke had a previous Buddhist name called Shen-Guang. He was from Luoyang. Having been an expert in the Doctrine of Confucius and Mencius since young, he was especially proficient in understanding profound theories. At the time when First Ancestor Bodhidharma resided in the Xiben Temple, Great Master Shen-Guang went to the temple to make an application for increase. Seeing that Great Master Shen-Guang had been studying heterogeneously with many preconceived ideas rooted deeply and was too self-assured, which would make a great obstacle in learning the true ideas of Zen, First Ancestor Bodhidharma refused him at once. Great Master Shen-Guang entreated for a long time, yet still could not cross the threshold, so he drew his sword and chopped his own left arm off."

Linghu Chong uttered a cry of shock, thinking to himself, "That was some fortitude Great Master Shen-Guang had shown in search of Buddhist principles and truths."

"His whole heartedness finally moved First Ancestor Bodhidharma," Fang-Zheng continued, "who accepted him as his student and renamed him to Hui-Ke. Thus, Second Ancestor Hui-Ke was able to inherit the mantle of First Ancestor Bodhidharma and carry on the teaching of Zen principles. What the Second Ancestor had learned from the First Ancestor Bodhidharma was the correct reason of the Buddhist doctrine, using the teaching in the Lankavatara Sutra for introspection and for realizing one's nature. Even though the name of our school's martial arts skills is widely known, it is, in fact, only a superficial study that is extremely insignificant. First Ancestor Bodhidharma only taught his apprentices ways to strength and invigorate their bodies. When the body is strengthened, the mind becomes clever, and when the mind becomes clever, the easier it is to comprehend. But many later disciples often became infatuated with martial arts, so as to attend to trifles and

neglect the essentials, therefore, gave no consideration to the original purpose of First Ancestor's martial arts teaching. Pity, what a pity!"

At that word, Fang-Zheng shook his head again and again with emotion. After a long pause, he finally went on.

"After First Ancestor passed away and returned to Heaven, Second Ancestor stumbled upon a volume of Buddhist scripture by First Ancestor's cattail hassock, and that was the Tendon Altering Sutra. This volume had very abstruse argumentation and principles, and even after Second Ancestor studied it assiduously, he still could not understand it. But he knew that if First Ancestor Bodhidharma had left this volume of scripture next to the stonewall after nine years of strict meditation it simply had to be extraordinary, even though it had few words. So Second Ancestor traveled all over many famous mountains and peaks in search of well-accomplished and eminent monks who could understand the true significance within. But at the time, Second Ancestor, himself, was already a well-accomplished and eminent monk. Even he couldn't understand the scripture after cudgeling his brain, it was only harder to try to find someone with even higher intelligence and more profound understanding than him. Hence, for twenty years, Second Ancestor searched in vain, and the mystery in the volume of scripture remained unsolved. One day, with the ultimate Karma, Second Ancestor was able to meet an Indian monk named Bancimidi on Mount Emei in Szechwan, and when they discussed Buddhist studies, they were congenial to each other. So Second Ancestor took out the Tendon Altering Sutra and studied intensively together with Bancimidi on top of the Golden Peak of Mount Emei. The two eminent Buddhist monks enlightened and inspired each other a great deal and were able to gain a thorough understanding after forty-nine days."

“Merciful Buddha! Thank Buddha!” putting his palms together, Fang-Sheng praised.

“But what Great Master Bancimidi explained were mostly theories of Zen. It was after another twelve years, when Second Ancestor chanced upon a young martial arts expert in the city of Chang-An and after a thorough discussion that lasted three days and three nights, was he able to apprehend the profound martial arts theories in the Tendon Altering Sutra to the full extent.” After a pause, he said, “And that young man was none other than Li Jing, who was made Wei-Lord for rendering his outstanding service to the founding of the Tang Dynasty and later assisting Emperor Tai-Zong in putting down the Turks rebellion. Wei-Lord Li’s exceptional achievements probably will also have to be attributed to the benefits he received from reading the Tendon Altering Sutra.”

“Wow,” Linghu Chong muttered as he thought to himself, “Turned out the Tendon Altering Sutra had such historical background.”

Fang-Zheng continued, “The Tendon Altering Sutra Kung Fu utilizes all the channels, passages of one’s body and bonds the spirits of the five internal organs. Comprehensive yet does not disperse, cycling through yet incessant. Energy originates from the within, while blood nourishes from the outside. Once the practitioner masters the Tendon Altering Sutra Kung Fu, power can be launched at a change of thought. The assembly and the release become part of a natural course, and complete themselves without conscious commands, just like the rising of the tide or the exploding of the thunder. Young hero, once one masters the Tendon Altering Sutra, it is almost like a small boat floating among gigantic waves of the ocean. When the angry waves surge about, the small boat naturally moves high and low accordingly, never makes an effort. Even if the boat had wanted to make an effort, where would the strength be coming from and where would the strength be used upon?”



Linghu Chong nodded again and again, knowing that the principle in the metaphor was broad and deep, and was also interlinked with the sword art theory Feng Qingyang had explained to him before.

“Just because the Tendon Altering Sutra contains such immense power, in the last several hundred years, it has not been taught to anyone except the right ones and the ones who had the Karma,” Fang-Zheng went on. “Without the blessed Karma, even outstanding and exceptional members of our own school can not be taught the secret of the sutra. Junior apprentice brother Fang-Sheng would make a good example. He already has high Kung Fu skills, and has always held his abstains rigorously. An outstanding disciple of our school he is, indeed. Yet, our Master didn’t teach him anything from the sutra.”

“Yes. Linghu Chong does not have such blessed Karma. I dare not ask for it absurdly,” Linghu Chong replied.

“Not so. Young hero is one with the Karma.” Fang-Zheng shook his head.

A mixed feeling of shock and delight surged in Linghu Chong’s chest. His heart thumped heavily, and he couldn’t believe that he actually was one with the Karma for this ultimate Kung Fu of the Shaolin School when eminent monks such as Great Master Fang-Sheng didn’t even have the fortune to learn it.

“The Buddha opens his wisdom to the vast audiences, but only ones with the Karma can attain the truth,” Fang-Zheng spoke slowly. “Young hero is the disciple of the venerable Grandmaster Feng – that is the one element of the Karma; young hero ended up coming to our Shaolin Temple – that is another element of the Karma; young hero will die unless he studies the Tendon Altering Sutra while apprentice brother Fang-Sheng could benefit from learning the sutra but wouldn’t suffer from not learning the sutra, either, and the difference in between is yet one more element of the Karma.”

“Young hero Linghu is blessed with the ultimate fortune. Fang-Sheng is gratified for you,” Fang-Sheng said, putting his palms together in a Buddhist greeting.

“Junior apprentice brother,” Fang-Zheng said, “it is in your nature that you always persist in things. You have never been able to see through the ultimate principle in the three ways of vimukta: ‘Void, Markless, and Non-action,’ thus not able to overcome the barrier of understanding the true meaning of life and death. It’s not that I am not willing to teach you the Tendon Altering Sutra. I am only afraid that once you start training in this superior Kung Fu, you will become infatuated with it, hence neglect the proper duties of Buddhist meditation.”

“Thank you, senior apprentice brother for the edification.” A look of anxiety appeared on Fang-Sheng’s face as he stood up and spoke in an utterly respectful voice.

Fang-Zheng nodded slightly to show his encouragement. He waited for a good while until a smile crept back onto Fang-Sheng’s lips before giving another nod and letting a small smile blossom on his own face. Turning his head toward Linghu Chong, he spoke again.

“There was originally a significant obstacle in this matter, but this obstacle no longer stood in our way. Even since First Ancestor Bodhidharma, this Tendon Altering Sutra was only taught to members of the Shaolin School, never anyone outside. I cannot let this stipulation end in my hands. That’s why young hero must join the Shaolin School of Mount Songshan and become a laymen apprentice of the Shaolin School.” After a short pause, he spoke again, “If young hero does not find the old monk loathsome, then you can become an apprentice of mine as a member of the ‘Guo’ class. You can change your name to Linghu Guochong.”

“Congratulations, young hero,” Fang-Sheng uttered a cry of joy. “Senior apprentice brother has only taken in two apprentices all his life, and that happened over thirty years ago. As the final apprentice of apprentice brother Abbot, not

only would you be able to learn the superior Kung Fu of the Tendon Altering Sutra, the twelve consummate Shaolin Skills my apprentice brother is expert in, can also be passed down to you according to your abilities. By then, young hero will certainly be able to brighten the name of our school and add an extraordinary splendor to the Martial World."

"Great Master Abbot, I can't be thankful enough to your great kindness. But I am already an apprentice of the Huashan School and it would be inappropriate for me to join another school and study under a new Master," Linghu Chong stood up and replied respectfully.

"Well, that is exactly the significant obstacle I had just mentioned." Fang-Zheng let out a slight smile. "Young hero, you probably don't know it yet, but you are no longer an apprentice of the Huashan School."

Linghu Chong was thunderstruck. "Why...why...why do you say that I am no longer an apprentice of the Huashan School?" His voice trembled as he spoke.

"Young hero, please take a look at this," taking a letter out from his sleeve pocket, Fang-Zheng answered. He gave his palm a gentle wave, and the letter glided toward Linghu Chong in a straight line.

As soon as Linghu Chong caught the letter in his hands, a shock shot down his spine. Gasping with astonishment, he couldn't help but think, "This Great Master Abbot has fathomless inner energy, indeed. Even with just a thin letter was he able to pass over such vigorous inner energy. How amazing!"

Looking down at the letter in his hands, he saw the red seal on the envelope that carried the words "Seal of the Huashan School Head Master." There were also characters in the middle of the envelope that said, "To Great Master Abbot of the Shaolin School." These characters were written with an upright form in a dignified style, and were precisely the handwriting of his Master, Yue Buqun. Faintly feeling a foreboding sensation, he drew the letter out with trembling

hands and read it. The sinking feeling in his stomach settled in as he read on, not able to believe that this would ever happen. After reading it the second time, he suddenly felt everything around him began spinning uncontrollably, and before he knew it, he had already collapsed to the floor with a loud thump. By the time he woke up again, he found himself in the arms of Great Master Fang-Sheng. Struggled back to his feet, Linghu Chong couldn't help but break into a loud cry.

"May I ask the reason for young hero's sorrow? Had any mishap happened to your respectful master?" Fang-Sheng asked.

"Great Master, please take a look," handing the letter to Fang-Sheng, Linghu Chong muttered, choking with sobs.

Taking the letter from Linghu Chong, Fang-Sheng took a good look at the letter, which said:

"Yue Buqun, the Head Master of the Huashan School, here presents his greetings to the Head Master of the Shaolin School: As the Head Master of the Huashan School with unmerited reputation, I have not been sending my regards to your highness, so as not to disturb your peace. This letter is in regard to the defiant apprentice of our school, Linghu Chong, who, with the disobedient character, had been repeatedly breaking school rules and even took up with evildoers and associated with brigands. Buqun must have been an inept Master, because even after strict reprimands and stern punishments, I still failed to show effect. In order to uphold the righteousness of the Martial World and the clean name of an orthodox school, I hereby expel the defiant apprentice Linghu Chong from the Huashan School. From now on, this defiant apprentice is no longer a member of our school. If he continues to collude with evil and bring calamity to the world, I request all friends of the orthodox schools to eliminate him with no mercy. With great anxiety and shame, I am writing this letter, and the words could not express my feelings to the full extent. I wish for your forgiveness."

This also took Fang-Sheng by great surprise. He wanted to comfort Linghu Chong but failed to find any words. Giving the letter back to Fang-Zheng, he took a glance at Linghu Chong, whose face was now covered with streams of tears, and heaved a long sigh.

"Alas, young hero, you really shouldn't have affiliated with members of the Dark-Wood Cliff."

"Every Head Master of the orthodox schools must have received similar letters from your respectful master and have already informed all their members. Even if you were perfectly fit, as soon as you walk out of this door, it will be like walking on thorns every step of the way, and all members of the orthodox schools will consider you a fatal enemy," Fang-Zheng spoke again.

These words stunned Linghu Chong. He immediately remembered hearing similar words from Ying-Ying by the mountain gully. By now, not only all the heterodox school members would be on his heels with a mission to kill him, all the orthodox school members would also consider him a fatal enemy. As vast as the world under heaven was, there seemed to have not a place he could shelter himself. Then he remembered the deep love of Master and Master-Wife, who could almost be considered his foster parents. They not only taught him Kung Fu, but also brought him up from a child. But he had been willful and committed all kinds of outrages, which ultimately caused his expulsion from the Huashan School. He could imagine in his mind how Master must have felt more pain and sorrow than him when he wrote these letters. Feeling of grief and shame welled in his heart; he almost itched to just bump his head against a wall to kill himself.

Out of his tear-filled eyes, he could vaguely make out the expression of deep pity on Fang-Zheng and Fang-Sheng's faces, and suddenly he remembered something: Liu Zhengfeng wanted to have his Gold Basin Hand Washing ceremony so he could quit the Martial World, but only

because he had taken up with the Demon's Cult Elder Qu Yang, he ended up dying under the Songshan School's sword. It was obvious that Righteousness and Evil were not irreconcilable. Even someone as powerful and prestigious as Liu Zhengfeng could not escape the fatal destiny, much less he, an isolated young man not worth mentioning and without any help, let alone the fact that the Five-Tyrant Ridge gathering of heresy could only be worse.

"The sea of bitterness has no boundaries, if one only turns his head, there is the shore," Fang-Zheng said slowly. "As long as one awakes to his errors, even if he were an unpardonably wicked person, Buddha will not turn his back to him. You are still young, and only took a wrong step in life for a moment and affiliated with the wrong kind of people mistakenly. That's not to say that you won't be able to make a fresh start. Your affiliation with the Huashan School has made a thorough break. Henceforth, as a member of our Shaolin School, you can thoroughly rectify your errors and be reborn again. I am sure it's not likely that someone in the Martial World would want to make trouble for you." He had spoken these words in a very casual manner, yet these words showed a sign of stateliness.

"Right now I have nowhere to go," Linghu Chong thought to himself. "If I rely upon the Shaolin School for protection, not only would I be able to learn the superior Kung Fu to save my life, with the prestige of the Shaolin School, indeed, no one would dare to make trouble for Great Master Fang-Zheng's apprentice." But right at the moment, a feeling of unyielding suddenly rose from within his chest. He thought, "If a man cannot even stand on his own feet between heaven and earth and has to rely upon another school for protection in shame, how can he be called a true man ever again? If the thousands of people in the Martial World want to kill me, so be it. I'll just let them come and kill me. Master doesn't want me anymore and has expelled me from the Huashan School. So what? I'll simply wander about alone by myself."

At that thought, he couldn't help but feeling righteous ardor surging up his throat, making him thirsty. All he wanted to do now was to drink a few dozens of strong liquor, and the thoughts about life, death, school or faction were all cast behind his back. At the instant, even Yue Lingshan, the one he had always borne in mind constantly, seemed to have become a complete stranger. Getting back onto his feet, he knelt down in front of Fang-Zheng and Fang-Sheng and then kowtowed respectfully. Believing that he had made up his mind to join the Shaolin School, Fang-Zheng and Fang-Sheng both revealed a smiling face.

"Since I am not even wanted by my own Master, I am too shamed to join another school. I can't thank the two Great Masters enough for your great kindness and mercy. Please accept my farewell," Linghu Chong stood up and declared in a loud voice.

Fang-Zheng was astounded, having not expected this young man to show no fear of death.

"Young hero, this matter concerns your life and death. Please don't be swayed by personal feelings," Fang-Sheng persuaded sincerely.

But Linghu Chong only replied with a burst of laughter. Turning on his heels, he walked out of the room. With his chest filled with grievance, his steps became unexpectedly nimble, and he went out of the Shaolin Temple in big strides.

As soon as he stepped out of the temple, feeling of desolation welled up in his heart. Looking up into the sky he laughed, thinking, "All the orthodox members consider me a vital enemy, while all the heretical members want to kill me. Linghu Chong most likely won't even make it to the end of the day. I'd like to see who would be the one taking away my life."

He checked his pockets. There was no money in his pocket, no sword by his waistband, and even the short zither given to him as a present by Ying-Ying was nowhere to be seen. It wouldn't have been overstating to say that by then

he owned nothing in this world and had not a concern about anything whatsoever.

He began walking down Mount Songshan. At the time of dusk, he was already far from the Shaolin Temple. The walk exhausted him and also made him feel very hungry.

"Where should I go about finding something to eat?" he thought to himself.

Suddenly, sounds of footsteps thumped as seven or eight men ran toward him in quick steps from the west. All of them were dressed up in tight robes, their weapons tying to their backs.

"If you want to kill me, it's better that you attack now, so as to save me the trouble of looking for food. Even if I eat my fill I am going to get killed anyway. Why hold the candle to the sun?" Linghu Chong thought to himself.

Stopping at the middle of the road, he stood, arms akimbo, and shouted, "Linghu Chong is right here! Go ahead! Come and kill me!"

But quite to his surprise, when these men ran by him, they simply cast a quick glance at him before making a detour around him.

"This man is a retard," one man muttered.

"Right! We'd better not let unnecessary incidents delay the more important matter," another man answered.

"It'll be terrible if we let him get away," a third man said.

Only moments later, the group of men had run into the distance.

"Turns out that they are after somebody else," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

Just when the sounds of footsteps from those men finally died down, sounds of hoof beats suddenly rose from the west, and soon five horses galloped by him like a gust of wind. After the horses had dashed out another one hundred feet or so, one of the horses turned around all of a sudden. The rider was a middle-aged woman.



"Excuse me, mister, you didn't happen to see an old man in a white robe, did you? He is quite thin and tall, and also carries a scimitar by his waist," she asked.

"No, I didn't." Linghu Chong shook his head.

Without another word, the woman turned the horse around and raced after the other four riders.

"Well, it seems that they are pursuing an old man in a white robe. I don't have anything to do, anyway. I might as well just go watch the fun," Linghu Chong thought to himself, and at that thought, he began walking toward the east.

He walked for about half an hour when another group of men, over a dozen of them, caught up with him in a small trot and then went past him.

"Howdy, bro, did you happen to see an old man in a white robe? He is quite thin and tall and has a scimitar by his waist," a man in his fifties turned his head back and asked.

"No, I didn't," Linghu Chong answered.

After another while, when he arrived at a fork in the road, sounds of horse bells<sup>61</sup> rose from the northwest corner as three horses dashed along the road at high speed. All three riders were young men in their twenties.

"Hey, I've got a question! Have you seen a...?" the leading rider waved his horsewhip in the air and asked.

"...a thin, tall, old man in a white robe with a scimitar by his waist, right?" Linghu Chong finished the sentence for him.

"That's right! You know where he is?" all looking utterly joyful, the three asked in unison.

"Sorry, I have not seen him," Linghu Chong said with a sigh.

The leading rider's temper hit the roof. "God damn it! Are you making fun of me? If you haven't seen him, how could you have described him?" he bellowed.

"Why couldn't I know the description before actually seeing him?" Linghu Chong grinned.

The leading young man raised the horsewhip in his hand and was about to whip it at Linghu Chong's head when another young man's voice rose.

"Second brother, don't complicate things. Let's get back to the chase, hurry!"

The young man holding the horsewhip let out a disgruntled snort as he waved the whip and hit the air then rode off together with the other two.

"Why are all these people going after an old man in a white robe. What did he do?" Linghu Chong thought to himself. "To follow them and watch the fun will certainly be entertaining, but if they realize that I am Linghu Chong, I bet they would kill me on the spot." At that thought, feeling of fear started stewing in his chest, but then he thought better of it. "At this stage, both the orthodox schools and the heretic schools want me dead. Dodging about might enable me to eke out a miserable life for a few more days, but eventually, I'll still have to face my bitter end, the final deathblow. What good is it to live a few more days of a life filled with dread? I'd rather accept the circumstances with good will and see who I'll lose my life to."

Having made up his mind, he walked on following the dust kicked up by the three horses right away. Later, several more groups of people went pass him in the same direction and all asked him about the "thin, tall, old man in a white robe with a scimitar by his waist."

"All of these different groups of people are chasing after the old man in white robe. None of them knows where he is, yet all of them are following the same direction. That is so strange!" Linghu Chong thought.

He walked on for another mile or so, crossing through a wood of pine trees, when suddenly a vast wilderness and a dense mass of people appeared in front of his eyes. There were at least six or seven hundred people in the crowd, but the wilderness was so large that the six or seven hundred people in the middle appeared to have only occupied a tiny

spot of it. A straight, broad road led directly to the large crowd, so Linghu Chong simply walked forward along the road, and as he walked closer, the scene became clearer.

In the middle of the crowd stood a small pavilion, the kind used as a wayside shelter for travelers to take a rest in. The build of the pavilion appeared simple and crude. The large crowd of people surrounded the pavilion in a circle yet kept a good distance from it, dozens of feet or so, and nobody closed in on it. After walking another one hundred feet closer, Linghu Chong finally saw him. An old man in a white robe sat in the middle of the pavilion all by himself, drinking wine next to a small table. Whether he had a scimitar by his waist, Linghu Chong could not tell from the distance. Even though he was sitting down, he still looked as tall as a person in average height standing up.

Feeling of reverence swelled up in Linghu Chong's heart. Surrounded by so many enemies, the old man was still able to drink his wine in such a calm and unhurried manner. Among all the heroes Linghu Chong had seen or heard of throughout his life, rarely had one displayed such exceptional heroic spirit. He slowly walked forward and shouldered his way into the crowd. Everyone in the crowd stared at the old man in white robe with fixed eyes and no one paid the slightest attention to Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong took a good look at the old man. He had a thin face. A bush of sparse, gray beard, long enough to reach his chest, fluttered under his chin in the breeze. Holding the wine cup in his hand, he gazed at the distance where the horizon met with the blue sky without casting even a glance at the crowd surrounding him. He carried a pack on his back, but there was no scimitar by his waist. Turned out that he didn't even have a weapon with him. Linghu Chong had no idea about the old man's name or origin, nor any clue why so many fellow martial people would come after him, nor whether the man was good or evil. He simply admired the heroic spirit the old man had put on display, the self-

assurance he had shown as though he was just drink by himself alone and there was no one else even present. And unconsciously, the feeling of mutual sympathy as a fellow sufferer also swelled up in his heart and consumed him. Taking big strides forward, he spoke loudly.

"Hello there, Senior Master. Don't you feel lonely drinking all by yourself? Let me be your accompany and drink with you." Walking straight into the pavilion, Linghu Chong cupped his hands toward the old man in greeting and then sat down by the table.

The old man turned his head around and shot a sharp side-glance toward Linghu Chong. What met his eyes was a weaponless and sick-faced young man he had never met before. He let out a snort as a slight look of surprise flashed by his face but did not answer.

Linghu Chong picked up the wine kettle and filled the wine cup in front of the old man before filling a wine cup for himself.

"Cheers!" he raised his cup and toasted. Emptying the content of the wine cup down his throat in a swift swing, he drank it up in one gulp. The wine turned out to be very strong liquor; not only did he feel as though his mouth had just been cut with sharp knives as soon as the wine was poured in, he felt as though his entire stomach was on fire now. "Excellent wine!" he praised in a loud voice.

"Hey idiot! Get out! We are here to fight old Xiang to death. Don't be a hindrance," a big fellow outside the pavilion bawled in a husky voice.

"I am only drinking together with Senior Master Xiang. How did I become a hindrance for you?" Linghu Chong replied with a grin.

He filled his cup and then poured the wine into his mouth once again.

"Excellent wine!" he said with a thumb up.

"Move aside, chap, if you don't want to die for nothing. We have Chief Dongfang's order to capture renegade Xiang

Wentian. If anyone wants to make trouble or interfere, he is guaranteed a horrible death," a chilling voice rose from the left side.

Linghu Chong cast a glance at the origin of the voice then caught sight of a thin, short man with a white face. The man was dressed in a black robe with a yellow band around his waist. There were two or three hundred people standing next to him all dressed in black robes, but their waistbands were in all kinds of different colors. Linghu Chong suddenly remembered: when he had met Elder Qu Yang of the Demon's Cult outside of the town of Hengshan, Qu was also dressed in the same kind of black robe, and he could vaguely remember that Qu also had a yellow band around his waist. The thin man said that he was following Chief Dongfang's order to capture a renegade, then, of course, these people were all cult members of the Demon's Cult. Could this thin man have been an elder of the Demon's Cult as well?

Filling his cup with wine, he drank it up a third time. "Excellent wine!" he praised and then said to the old man in white robe, Xiang Wentian, "Senior Master Xiang, I've drunk three cups of your wine. Many thanks! Many thanks!"

"That chap is the expelled apprentice of the Huashan School, Linghu Chong!" someone suddenly shouted out loud from the east end.

Linghu Chong cast a glance toward the direction of the voice and immediately recognized the man who had spoken out: it was Hou Renxiong, the apprentice of the Qingcheng School. Since he paid more attention to the crowd with this glance, he also realized that among the people standing next to Hou Renxiong, many were also members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance.

"Linghu Chong," a Taoist Priest spoke in a loud and clear voice, "your Master said that you have taken up with evildoers, and he certainly said it right. This demon Xiang Wentian's murderous hands are both covered with blood of chivalry members of the orthodox schools. What are you

doing staying together with him? If you don't get lost right now, we'll chop you into bits and pieces."

"Are you an Uncle-Master of the Taishan School? I have never met this Senior Master Xiang before in my entire life. I've only stepped out because I saw the hundreds of you surrounding a man who was all by himself. What is that? And when did the Five Mountains Sword Alliance decided to collaborate with the Demon's Cult? Aren't you afraid to become the laughing stocks of all the heroes under Heaven taking on Senior Master Xiang, a single man, with the combined force of both the orthodox and the heretic schools?" Linghu Chong replied.

"When did we ever collaborate with the Demon's Cult? The Demon's Cult is here to capture a renegade of their cult; we are here to avenge for friends who have died under the devil's murderous hands. They do their thing and we do our thing. There's no relevance whatsoever!" the Taoist Priest rebuffed furiously.

"Good, good! As long as you fight him one on one, I'll just sit here, drink my wine and watch the fun," Linghu Chong said.

"Who the hell do you think you are? Everybody, let's kill this chap before we get even with that devil Xiang," Hou Renxiong yelled.

"There would be no need to trouble so many people just to kill Linghu Chong, a single man. Brother Hou, you can just come and do it yourself," Linghu Chong said with a grin.

Hou Renxiong knew very well that his own Kung Fu skills were inferior to that of Linghu Chong's learning from his past experience with Linghu Chong in the wine house when Linghu Chong had sent him rolling down the stairs with a single kick and certainly dared not to challenge Linghu Chong all by himself. But he had no idea that the Linghu Chong now was far from the Linghu Chong then and had lost all his internal strengths. The others in the group seemed to

have great scruples about Xiang Wentian's Kung Fu skills and none was bold enough to charge into the pavilion.

"Xiang Wentian, when things have come down to this extent, you'd better go see the chief with us and ask for pardon from his Highness. There's still a chance that his Highness might spare your life. You are a great man in our cult. Would you rather see flesh and blood flying in all directions when we fight to death so the outsiders can laugh their heads off?" the thin man from the Demon's Cult shouted.

Xiang Wentian only answered with a snort and gave a sip to the wine in his cup. As he raised his cup, something clanked, and that was when Linghu Chong noticed the iron shackles chained around his two wrists in astonishment.

"So he just escaped from his prison and hasn't even removed the shackles around his wrists," Linghu Chong thought to himself as compassion swelled up in his heart. "This man is unable to defend himself. Why don't I help him fend off the attacks for a little while and just give away my life here in this muddled fight?"

At that thought, he stood up, arms akimbo, and said loudly, "How can Senior Master Xiang fight you with his hands tied up in iron chains? Since I drank three cups of his great wine, I guess it will have to be my duty to give him a hand in his defense. Anyone who wants to lay a finger on Senior Master Xiang will have to kill Linghu Chong first."

Seeing how Linghu Chong had come forward for him for no apparent reason in such a lunatic manner, Xiang Wentian was taken by complete surprise. "Hey boy, why do you help me?" he asked in a whisper.

"Upon seeing injustice, draw one's sword to set right a wrong," Linghu Chong replied.

"Where's your knife then?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"Oh, I use a sword. Too bad I don't have one," Linghu Chong replied.

“How are your skills in the sword art? Aren’t you from the Huashan School? Then I am afraid your skills in the sword art won’t be anything exceptional.”

“Nothing exceptional. Besides, I have very severe injuries and have lost all my internal strengths. That only makes the matter worse!” Linghu Chong grinned.

“Man, you are an oddball. Did you know that? Fine, I’ll go get a sword for you,” Xiang Wentian replied.

A white shadow suddenly flashed in front of everybody’s eyes as Xiang Wentian charged toward the crowd. Instantly, reflections from various blades twinkled as over a dozen weapons struck toward him. But Xiang Wentian unexpectedly accelerated sideways and pounced on the Taoist Priest from the Taishan School. The Taoist Priest thrust his sword forward at once. With an agile sway, Xiang Wentian dodged the thrust and stepped behind the Priest’s back. He quickly threw his left elbow backward, which struck the middle of the Taoist Priest’s back in a loud thud. Waving his two arms slightly immediately after, he caught the Taoist Priest’s long sword with the iron chain, and with a swift push to the ground using his left foot, he had leapt back into the pavilion. The entire series of moves were executed in such lightning fast speed. The many fighters of the orthodox schools had the intension of intercepting him but simply had the time for the reaction. One man was the fastest to react and chased after Xiang Wentian instantly. At the time Xiang Wentian had returned to the pavilion, he was only several feet from the pavilion. Raising the broadsword in his hand, he swung the blade at Xiang Wentian’s back. But it was as if Xiang Wentian had eyes on his back; without even looking back, he threw a back kick with his left foot, which struck right in the man’s solar plexus, sending him flying in the air in a painful cry. The man had put all his strength into the fierce swing of his blade and had no way of retracting the force in time. With a heavy thud, the knife followed through its course and cut off the man’s own right leg. Meanwhile, the



Taoist Priest from the Taishan School swayed a few times and then collapsed to the ground, blood gushing out continuously from his mouth.

Thunderous cheers exploded among the Demon's Cult crowd. "That's some handsome skills, Right Counselor Xiang!" dozens of excited voices shouted in unison.

Xiang Wentian let out a slight grin and clenched his fist in greetings toward the crowd of the Demon's Cult members, acknowledging the loud cheers. The iron chain tied around his wrists clanked loudly. With a swing of his arm, Xiang Wentian threw the sword toward the table, and with a clatter, the sword tip cut into the table.

"Here you go!" he said.

Linghu Chong felt admiration growing inside him. "This man dares to outface so many first-class masters. Turned out he truly has extraordinary skills," he thought inwardly. But he didn't reach out for the sword.

"Senior Master Xiang possesses such superior Kung Fu skills. There is really no need for me to make a fool of myself. Goodbye," he said, clenching his fist in greetings.

Before Xiang Wentian had a chance to reply, cold flashes from naked blades flickered as three long swords shot toward the pavilion – three apprentices of the Qingcheng School, Hou Renxiong among them, had launched their attacks. All three long swords were aimed at Linghu Chong: one pointed at the middle of his back while the other two pointed at his lower back. The tips of all three swords were less than a foot from Linghu Chong.

"Linghu Chong, on your knees!" Hou Renxiong bellowed. After the shout, he pushed his long sword forward and the sword tip touched Linghu Chong's skin.

"Linghu Chong is a man of high virtues. Even though death is my destiny today, there's no way I'll let myself die from these despicable Qingcheng people's swords," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

At the moment, he was completely enveloped by the forces from the three swords. If he tried to turn around, then instantly, one sword would penetrate his chest and the two other swords would cut into his lower abdomen. So he immediately let out a few loud laughs.

“Fine, I’ll be on my knees!” he replied.

Bending his right knee slightly, Linghu Chong quickly retrieved the long sword on the table and gave it a swift swing behind his back. Instantaneously, the three hands of the Qingcheng apprentices were cut off from their wrists and fell to the ground together with their three long swords. Their faces turning completely pale, the three Qingcheng apprentices couldn’t even believe their eyes. Only freezing there for a moment from panic, they finally remembered to leap back. One of the Qingcheng apprentice among the three was only about eighteen or nineteen years of age and instantly broke into a loud cry from the excruciating pain.

“Brother, it was you who wanted to kill me first!” Linghu Chong sighed.

“Excellent sword art!” Xiang Wentian cheered. But then he said, “The strength is too weak. Terrible inner strength!”

“It’s not terrible inner strength; there’s no inner strength at all,” Linghu Chong replied with a grin.

Suddenly Xiang Wentian let out a loud shout, then dense clanking sounds from the iron chain followed – two men in black robes had leapt into the pavilion and launched a full out attack at him. One wielded a pair of wrought iron maces while the other one held a pair of iron plates in his hands – both men used weapons of the ultra heavy type. Sparks flew in all directions as the four pieces of weaponry clashed with Xiang Wentian’s iron chain. Xiang Wentian dodged a few times in an attempt to get behind the man with iron maces, but the man put up a good defense line with his two maces, shielding all his vital points around his body. Having his two hands tied up in the iron chain, Xiang Wentian obviously had lost quite some agility and speed.

More berating shouts rose exploded from within the crowd of the Demon's Cult members as another two men charged into the pavilion. Both of these two used octagonal copper hammers as their weapons and both smashed their hammers downwardly at Xiang Wentian again and again. As soon as the two with four hammers joined the fight, the man wielding a pair of wrought iron maces immediately turned from defense to offense. Xiang Wentian ducked and darted within the limited space; even though his movements were utterly clever and nimble, he still could not injure any one of his opponents. Every time when there was a crack for Xiang Wentian to take use of, as soon as he tried to exploit it and attacked one with his iron chain, the other three would throw themselves on him like mad men with no regard of their own safety. Such fighting techniques were as fierce as it could be.

After they have exchanged a dozen or so moves, the leader of the Demon's Cult crowd shouted, "Eight spears, charge, all together!"

At that command, long spears in their tight grips, eight men in black robes rushed into the pavilion from all four directions. North, south, east and west, two long spears in each direction, all aimed at Xiang Wentian.

"Little friend, you'd better get out of here!" Xiang Wentian shouted at Linghu Chong. Before his voice even died out, the eight long spears had stabbed toward him all at once; in the meantime, the four copper hammers pounded toward his chest and stomach, the two iron maces swept toward his shinbones, and the two iron plates smashed toward his face - all vicious moves in all directions. At the moment, the twelve first-class fighters of the Demon's Cult had spared neither effort nor mercy; apparently every one of them knew too well that fighting Xiang Wentian was the most dangerous thing in the entire world, and any second longer the fight lasted would only translate to another step closer to the gate of hell.

“How shameless!” seeing the many people attacking Xiang Wentian so ruthlessly and the chance for Xiang Wentian to come through with this getting slimmer by the second, Linghu Chong bawled.

All of a sudden, Xiang Wentian spun his body in tremendous speed, and the iron chain around his wrists swung up and clanked loudly as it collided with the many weapons. His body almost looked like a peg-top, spinning so rapidly that all everyone could see was a white blurry shadow. Two loud clanks exploded when his iron chain collided with the two iron plates, sending them flying out of the pavilion through the top, leaving two big holes in the ceiling. By then, Xiang Wentian didn't even bother looking at the moves of his opponents and simply spin faster and faster, knocking the eight long spears away from him.

“Slow down your attack and let him exhaust himself!” the Demon Cult leader ordered.

“Yes!” the eight spear-wielding men answered all together and then each took two steps back, waiting for the chance of another full out attack when Xiang Wentian would show cracks in his defense shield from any slight exhaustion.

Among the watching audiences, the ones who had a little bit of experience could all tell that Xiang Wentian would not spin like this for very long no matter how extraordinary his Kung Fu skills were. Continue fighting like this, Xiang Wentian would only end up exhausting all his strength and wait for capture with tied hands.

Xiang Wentian broke into loud laughter. Suddenly, he squatted slightly and struck out with the iron chain. The end of the iron chain hit one of the men wielding copper hammers right in the waist. The man cried out loud in pain, and the copper hammer in his left hand swung back toward himself and smashed his own head. The eight spearmen thrust their spears out in unison, attacking all around Xiang Wentian's body. Xiang Wentian swung his iron chain and knocked two spears out of the way, while the other six spears

stabbed toward the right side of his rib cage as though agreed upon beforehand. At the instant, even if Xiang Wentian could dodge the first spear, he would not be able to dodge the second one, or even if Xiang Wentian could manage to dodge the second spear, there was no way for him to dodge the third one, much less when there were a total of six spears thrust at him at the same time.

Watching by the side, Linghu Chong saw the simultaneous stabs from the six spears and knew that Xiang Wentian had no chance of dodging them. Before he knew it, he was seized by a sudden impulse and remembered the fourth stance of the Dugu Nine Swords, Spear-breaking Stance. The extremely critical situation did not allow him to think any further; with a cold flash, he thrust out his long sword. A loud clank echoed as the eight spears fell to the floor. There were eight spears falling down to the floor, yet there was only one clank, as though the eight spears had fallen to the floor at the exact moment. Since the move from Linghu Chong was aimed at eight different wrists, of course it could not hit eight wrists at the exact instant, but the thrust was so fast that it almost felt as though the thrust prodded all eight wrists simultaneously.

Once the sword moves started, Linghu Chong simply followed the flow and launched the fifth move, Mace-breaking Stance. The name "Mace-breaking Stance" was a general title and contained many variations of techniques. It can be used to counter short handled weapons ranging from steel club, iron mace, acupoint-sealing peg, judge's-pens, crutches, Emei sting, dagger, war axe, iron plate, octagonal hammer, and iron awl. After a few quick flashes, the two iron maces and the two copper hammers also fell to the floor. Out of the total of twelve Demon's Cult members charging into the pavilion, except one that had been killed by Xiang Wentian and one whose iron plates had been knocked out of his grips, the rest ten men all took a prod on their wrists and dropped their weapons. After a cry in panic, the eleven men

ran back to their own crowd in a fluster while the crowd of orthodox school members couldn't help but cheer loudly.

"Excellent sword art!"

"The sword art of the Huashan School has really widened our views!"

The Demon Cult leader gave another command and a group of five charged into the pavilion at once – a middle-aged woman wielding two long knives came running directly toward Linghu Chong and the other four men began attacking Xiang Wentian in a circle. The woman's knife moves were extremely speedy. She had one knife in defense and one knife in quick offense. When the left knife was attacking, she would use the right knife to defend, and vice versa, when the right knife was attacking, she would use the left knife to defend. So by using both knives, every move was attacking the enemy while every move was also defending herself. The defense was tight and secure while the attack was vivid and through. Linghu Chong couldn't see the moves clearly and had to take four steps back in a row. Then he heard loud swooshing sounds. It looked as though someone was attacking Xiang Wentian with a flexible weapon. While busying himself in dodging the chops from the woman, Linghu Chong still managed to take a peer with a squint. What he saw were two men, each wielding a chained mallet, and two men using whips in a fierce fight with Xiang Wentian, who still only had the iron chains around his wrists. The steel chain on a chained mallet was very long, and when one swung the chained mallet, it could reach up to ten feet away. For several times, the mallet actually flew over Linghu Chong's head only a few feet above him.

"Dammit!" Xiang Wentian cursed.

"Right Counselor Xiang, pardon me!" a man yelled in reply.

Turned out that the iron chain around Xiang Wentian's wrists had been entwined with the steel chain from one of the chained mallet. And in a snap of a second, the other

three weapons from the rest three attackers struck at Xiang Wentian's body concurrently. Xiang Wentian sneered. He pulled with tremendous force, pulling the man wielding the chained mallet right in front of him just in time, and the two whips together with the second chained mallet all landed squarely on the man's back.

Linghu Chong thrust his sword out in a tilted angle, and the sword tip drifted a few times before hitting the woman's left wrist. But the blade of the sword actually bent into an arc with a loud clang, and instead of falling out of the grip from the woman's hand, the long knife chopped right back at Linghu Chong from sideways.

Linghu Chong felt a shock, but soon understood, "She is wearing a wrist cuff made of steel. That's why the sword tip could not cut through it."

Rotating his wrist slightly, he turned the thrust into an upward poke. Thud! The sword tip pierced the Jian-Zhen Acupoint on the woman's left shoulder. The woman froze for a split second, but being a bold and tough fighter, she still slashed the knife in her right hand with all her strength despite the great pain coming from her left shoulder. Linghu Chong snapped his wrist gently and with a quick flash, the woman's Jian-Zhen Acupoint on her right shoulder was also hit and she could no longer hold on to her weapons. She used all her remaining strength to throw the two knives at Linghu Chong, but her two arms had already lost most of their strengths; the two knives only went as far as a little bit over one foot before losing their momentum and falling to the floor.

Right after Linghu Chong had defeated the woman, a Taoist Priest stepped out of the crowd of the orthodox school members.

"I am afraid that the Huashan School probably doesn't have such bewitched sword art," he bawled out.

From his attire, Linghu Chong could tell that he must have been a senior master in the Taishan School. He also

figured that the Taoist Priest must have loathed how Xiang Wentian had injured his fellow apprentice and decided to step forward to get even. Although Linghu Chong had been expelled from the Huashan School by his Master, having grown up in the Huashan School, he always remembered the motto: the Five Mountains Sword Alliance, same root different branches. So upon seeing this senior master from the Taishan School, naturally he reacted respectfully. Turning his long sword to point the sword tip downward, he cupped his hands in greetings.

“Linghu Chong dares not to offend Uncle-Master of the Taishan School.”

The Taoist Priest’s name was Tian-Yi and was in the same generation of apprenticeship with Priest Tian-Men and Priest Tian-Song.

“What kind of sword art did you just use?” he asked coldly.

“The sword art Linghu Chong just used was taught by a senior master of the Huashan School,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Total nonsense!” Priest Tian-Yi let out a disgruntled snort. “Where did you find a devil to teach you that? Watch out!”

As soon as the last word went out of his mouth, Priest Tian-Yi thrust his sword directly at Linghu Chong’s chest. The naked blade flashed accompanied by a continuing buzzing sound. Just with this one thrust, the forces carried on the sword had already covered the Tan-Zhong, Shen-Zang, Ling-Xu, Shen-Fen, Bu-Lang, Yu-Man, and Tong-Gu these seven major acupoints on Linghu Chong’s chest, and regardless of which way he dodged, the sword tip would always be able to penetrate one of the seven acupoints.

This sword move was named “Seven Stars in the Vast Sky” and was the cream of the crop in the entire Taishan School Sword Art. Once the move had started, the only way to evade it was to leap back over a dozen feet instantly. Not



only would it require the opponent to possess very advanced Qing-Gong skills, the opponent also needed to be fully aware of the potential power of this “Seven Stars in the Vast Sky” move and leap backward without any hesitation as soon as the move was executed in order to escape the fatal injury from a chest penetration. And as soon as the opponent landed back onto his feet, he must be ready to parry the three swift and fierce consecutive moves that came immediately after. These three consecutive moves, each one more vicious than the previous one and all interlinked, would be very difficult to cope with. Since Priest Tian-Yi saw with his own eyes how excellent Linghu Chong’s sword art skills were, he decided to use this move with his first thrust. Ever since the senior master of the Taishan School invented this sword move, it probably had never been used in the first round of fight before today.

Astonished by the sudden attack, Linghu Chong suddenly had a brainwave and remembered seeing this move on the rock wall inside the back cave on top of the Cliff of Contemplation. That day he actually studied this move so he could use it against Tian Boguang. Even though he had failed to imitate it correctly and hadn’t beat Tian Boguang with the move, he had a clear understanding of the flow of this sword move. At the instant when the cold blade almost touched his body, having no spare time to think it through, he thrust his sword at Priest Tian-Yi’s lower abdomen at once. This thrust was none other than the thrust depicted in the drawing on the rock wall, the one created by the Demon’s Cult Elder to counter this move. At the first glance, it seemed that this thrust would allow the practitioner to end in common ruin together with his enemy, but in fact, this move “Seven Stars in the Vast Sky” of the Taishan School actually had two sections: in the first section the force of the sword would cover the seven vital acupoint on the enemy’s chest, and while the enemy was scared out of his wits, the practitioner would use the techniques in the second section to penetrate

one of the seven acupoints he saw fit. Even though the force from the sword covered seven acupoints, but to kill the enemy, one stab would do the job. Regardless of which acupoint the sword penetrated, the resulting victory would have been all the same, that was why there would have been no need to penetrate all seven acupoints, and it would have been impossible to penetrate all seven acupoints at the same instant. One move containing two sections was actually the key of success for this sword move, but after the Demon's Cult Elder deliberated it carefully many years back, he was able to find the flaw from within: as soon as the first section of the sword move was executed, if the opponent immediately thrust at the lower abdomen of the enemy, the move "Seven Stars in the Vast Sky" would have been broken, and the second section would never happen.

As soon as Priest Tian-Yi saw the profound counter move from Linghu Chong, he knew too well that he had no way of dodging it. Turning completely pale with fright, he screamed in fear, figuring that by then the long sword must have penetrated his abdomen. In the utmost panic, he could no longer feel any pain, and his brain also seemed to have seized functioning. Convinced that he must have died already, he collapsed to the ground. At the time when his sword tip was almost touching Priest Tian-Yi's lower abdomen, Linghu Chong had stopped the thrust midway; who would have thought that the Priest Tian-Yi would be scared unconscious from the tremendous shock.

Watching Priest Tian-Yi collapsing to the ground, members of the Taishan School in the crowd were convinced that Linghu Chong must have seriously injured Tian-Yi and immediately shouted loud curses. Five young Taoist Priests ran out of the crowd and charged at Linghu Chong. These five men were all apprentices of Priest Tian-Yi. Consumed by blinding rage and the determination to avenge for their Master, they waved their five long swords about madly and swept toward Linghu Chong like a thunderstorm. Linghu

Chong poked out with his long sword in quick succession and the five Taoist Priests each took a cut in his wrist. Loud clanking echoed when five long swords fell to the floor. Scared out of their wits, the five men leapt back when Priest Tian-Yi tottered back onto his feet, screaming at the top of his lungs.

“I am dead! I am dead!”

The five apprentices were thunderstruck. They couldn't find any wound on their Master's body, but hearing their master screaming again and again, they were not sure whether their master was dead already or still alive.

After several loud screams, Priest Tian-Yi's body gave a violent shake and he collapsed to the ground once again. Two of his apprentices rushed by his side and propped him up, then retreated back to the crowd in sore straits.

With only half a move, Linghu Chong had defeated Priest Tian-Yi, an elite fighter of the Taishan School. The audiences found themselves in complete shock. By then, the attackers around Xiang Wentian had changed. The two men wielding long swords were members of the Hengshan School. Their two swords rose and fell speedily, always looking for gaps in Xiang Wentian's defense with the iron chain. Another man held a shield in his left hand and a knife in his right hand. He was someone from the Demon's Cult. Using the shield to protect his body, the man fought with a Ground-Snuggling Knife Form. He would roll close to Xiang Wentian's feet and then attack his lower body from close to the ground. Twice, Xiang Wentian struck the man's shield heavily with his iron chain, which had no effect the man under the shield. But the knife under the shield kept stretching out and drawing back, one vicious move after another.

“With the shield to protect his body, this man's defense is very tight. But when he stretches his arm out to attack, that's when the weakness exposes. His opponent can then break his arm,” Linghu Chong thought.

“Hey, buddy, do you want to die?” suddenly, a voice rose from behind his back.

The voice was not particularly loud, but it was very close to him, probably only a foot or so from his ear. Astounded, Linghu Chong turned around and then found himself standing face to face next to a man, so close that their noses almost touched each other. Just when he was about to duck, the man had placed his two palms on Linghu Chong’s chest.

“If I strike with my inner energy, it will break all your ribs,” the man said in a chilling voice.

Linghu Chong knew the man was not exaggerating, and stood still, his heart almost stopped beating. The man gazed into Linghu Chong’s eyes. Since the two of them were so close to each other, Linghu Chong couldn’t see the man’s face. All he could see were two sharp and shining eyes with a stern stare.

“So this is the man who will kill me,” Linghu Chong thought, feeling much at ease now that the matter of his life would finally be settled once for all.

The man also noticed the mood change. At first, Linghu Chong’s eyes were filled with terror, but only instants later it was already replaced by a look of unconcern and indifference. Facing death with assurance was something even masters with superior attainments in the Martial World could rarely achieve. He couldn’t help but feel respect spewing in his heart.

“I subdued your vital acupoint only by a sneak attack. If I kill you like this, I am sure you’ll refuse to take defeat!” he said with a laugh before retreating his palms and taking three steps back.

Now Linghu Chong could finally take a good look at him. What he saw was a short, chubby man with a yellowish, fat face in his fifties. His two fat palms were both small and thick. With one palm up and one palm down, the man showed a stance of the “Songyang Palm.”

“Senior master of the Hengshan School, may I ask for your respectful name? Many thanks for showing mercy with your palm strike,” Linghu Chong said with a smile.

“I am Yue Hou,” the man replied. After a short pause, he spoke again, “Your sword skills are outstanding, indeed. But your combat experience is too little.”

“How embarrassing! ‘Great Yin-Yang Palm’ Uncle-Master Yue, you are too fast for me,” Linghu Chong said.

“Uncle-Master? I really don’t deserve that!” Yue Hou replied.

Bringing his left hand upward, he threw a knife-hand chop with his right hand. Though his appearance was ugly, as soon as his move started, his entire body looked as solemn as a mountain with imposing bearings and became indescribably attractive. Linghu Chong couldn’t find a single flaw around his entire body.

“Excellent palm skills!” Linghu Chong acclaimed and swung his long sword upward. Because he couldn’t find a single flaw in Yue Hou’s palm form and his movement, this thrust of his had both defense and offense, ninety percent of it was false while only ten percent of it was real.

But in Yue Hou’s eyes, this upward swing was brilliant. Regardless of which part of Linghu Chong’s body he planned to strike using his two palms, he would always end up sending the center of his palm toward the tip of the sword. So only half way through the palm strikes with his two hands, he immediately retracted his palms and leapt backward.

“Excellent sword art!” he shouted.

“Pardon me!” Linghu Chong replied humbly.

“Watch out!” Yue Hou yelled as he pushed out with both palms and a strong gust of energy force blasted toward Linghu Chong.

“Oh no!” Linghu Chong groaned inwardly.

At the time Yue Hou was at a good distance from him. When Yue struck out with his two palms remotely, he had no way of warding the attack off using his long sword. Just when

the thought of jumping out of the way popped in his mind, a freezing sensation had shot up his entire body. He couldn't help but shiver. The palm strike from each of You Hou's hands had different attributes. One had the force of Yin while the other had the force of Yang. The Yang palm strike was launched earlier, yet the Yin force reached the target first. Linghu Chong only had a fraction of a second to pull himself together when the burning hot energy force struck his body and shook his body violently, almost knocked the wind out of him. When one was struck with both the Yin energy force and the Yang energy force, normally he would have no chance of surviving, but in Linghu Chong's case, though he had lost all his inner energy, his body was filled with abundant inner energy, among which were the inner energy from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies, also the inner energy from Monk No Commandment, and when he was in the Shaolin Temple, he also received a good amount of inner energy from Great Master Fang-Sheng. Any one of those energy streams was vigorous enough, not mentioning he had many of them inside him. When the two energy forces, one Yin and one Yang, struck his body, the inner energy streams inside him naturally reacted by creating energy shields around his internal organs and his vital channels, preventing any injuries. But the strike still gave a tremendous shake to his entire body and he felt indescribable suffering. Afraid that Yue Hou would strike him again with energy forces, he dashed out of the pavilion and thrust his sword out rapidly.

Succeeded with his remote palm strikes, You Hou figured that his opponent would at least drop down with severe injuries if not drop dead. He had not expected to see Linghu Chong getting off without a scratch. Then immediately after, many reflections from the sword tip flashed, all aiming at the center of his palms. Astounded, he crisscrossed his palms and struck out, one striking toward Linghu Chong's face, the other one striking toward Linghu Chong's lower abdomen. Just when he was about to release the energy forces for the

strikes, he suddenly felt a violent pain: his one palm on the back of the other, both had been stringed together by the blade of Linghu Chong's long sword. It was unclear whether Linghu Chong had penetrated his two palms consecutively or he had struck his palms to the tip of the sword himself. All he could see was that his left palm was in front, his right palm was behind, and the exposing blade behind the back of his right palm was as long as five inches.

If Linghu Chong took advantage of the situation and push his sword forward, the sword tip would instantly penetrate Yue Hou's chest, but with consideration of how Yue had showed him mercy with the palm strike earlier, he held his sword still after the blade penetrated Yue's two palms. Yue Hou let out a loud cry, pulled his palms off the blade, and leapt backward.

"Sorry!" Linghu Chong called out, feeling very regretful.

The move he had just used was one of the techniques in the Palm-breaking Stance of the Dugu Nine Swords. Ever since Feng Qingyang went into seclusion, this move had never emerged in the entire Martial World. Suddenly loud cracking sounds exploded from behind Linghu Chong. He turned his head and looked over his shoulder and saw seven or eight men attacking Xiang Wentian all together. Two men in the group had very fierce palm power and the forces from their palm strikes had broke the pillar and the girder of the pavilion. Rafters and tiles started falling off the roof one after another, but the fighters were so involved in the fight, even when tiles fell on their heads, none paid any attention.

Within the brief moment when Linghu Chong looked back over his shoulder, Yue Hou had charged at him and struck out with a palm strike. The force from the palm strike hit Linghu Chong squarely on his chest and sent him flying in the air, his long sword also falling out of his grip. Before his back even landed back to the ground, seven or eight men had dashed toward him, raising their weapons high in the air and striking down toward him all together.

“Hey, you cherry pickers!” Linghu Chong grinned.

Suddenly, he felt something tightening around his waist – an iron chain had just flown by, wrapped around his body, and pulled hard. And in the next moment, he was already flying in the midair as though he had the magical power of mounting the clouds and riding the mist. It was none other than the master-hand of the Demon’s Cult, Xiang Wentian, who had just saved his life.

Having been chased around and beleaguered by both the Demon’s Cult and the orthodox schools, Xiang Wentian had been on the brink of exhaustion. Then, all of a sudden, a fear-for-nothing young man stepped out of nowhere to defend him against injustice. Naturally he had a high opinion of the young man. After watching how Linghu Chong had fought with his opponent, Xiang Wentian had made out that the young man had extraordinary sword art skills yet had terrible inner strength; and with so many tough enemies attacking him all together, he was really in an extremely dangerous state. Therefore, while contending with his own enemies, he never ceased paying attention to Linghu Chong’s condition. When he saw Linghu Chong being knocked into the air, he swung his iron chain at him right away and began scurrying, pulling Linghu Chong behind him.

Once Xiang Wentian began running using his Qing-Gong, it was as though he had turned into a galloping horse, and within only seconds, he was already scores of feet away. Dozens of people chased behind him, and many shouted out loudly.

“Xiang Wentian escaped! Xiang Wentian escaped!”

Xiang Wentian was exasperated. Turning around all of a sudden, he charged a few steps back. The men chasing him were taken completely by surprise and paused their steps at once. One of them had slightly weaker Qing-Gong skills. Not able to stop his running so abruptly like everybody else, he



ran directly into Xiang Wentian's left foot flying kick and flew right back toward the chasing crowd.

Turning around once again, Xiang Wentian resumed running, and the crowd behind him also resumed their chase. By now, none of the followers was bold enough to dash at full speed, and the distance between Xiang Wentian and them furthered gradually.

"This young man was never acquainted with me yet was ready to die for me. Friends like this are too hard to come by. But those bastards simply would not leave me alone. How can I get rid of them?" Xiang Wentian thought to himself without slowing down with his running.

After a moment of running, he suddenly remembered a place and felt very pleased. "That place would be just perfect." But another thought immediately popped out, "That place is far from here. I wonder if I have enough strength to run over there. No worries! If I run out of strength, those bastards would only run out of strength before I do."

He looked up at the sun to make out the directions, and then crossed the wheat field in a diagonal line and headed straight toward the northeast corner. After running another five miles or so, he had returned to the main road. Suddenly three galloping horses dashed past them narrowly missing them.

"God damn it!" Xiang Wentian cursed.

He suddenly took in a long breath and accelerated until he was right behind the last horse. Leaping into the midair, he kicked the rider off the horseback with a swift flying kick and then landed on the horseback himself. After placing Linghu Chong across the saddle in front of him, he swung his iron chain in a sweeping motion and knocked the two riders off their horsebacks. The strike broke the two riders' many bones and evidently they would not survive it. Judging from their attires, all three riders were common people, none had anything to do with the Martial World. It was very unfortunate that they happened to bump into Xiang Wentian

the malefic at the nick of time and lost their lives for no reason. The two horses kept galloping forward even though their riders had fallen off. Xiang Wentian shot the iron chain out and caught the reins. He was able to utilize the iron chain free at will as though it was an extra long arm of his. Witnessing his indiscriminate killing of innocent people, Linghu Chong couldn't help but groan inwardly.

Having seized three horses, Xiang Wentian found himself in high spirits. He looked up at sky and burst into loud laughter.

"Little brother, those bastards won't be able to keep up with us now!" he exclaimed.

"Not for today. But what about tomorrow?" Linghu Chong let out a slight smile.

"God damn it! The hell with them! I'll whack them one by one," Xiang Wentian cursed.

Riding the three horses in turns, Xiang Wentian speeded down the main road for a good while and then turned into a mountain road. The mountain road became steeper and steeper. Eventually, it was too steep for the horses to climb.

"Are you hungry?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"En," Linghu Chong nodded. "Do you have any food?" he asked.

"Nope. But we have horse blood!" Xiang Wentian answered.

He dismounted his horse, and clawed the neck of the horse with his right hand, instantly creating a big hole in it and thick streams of blood gushed out at once. Moving his mouth next to it, Xiang Wentian swallowed several gulps of horse blood.

"Your turn!" he said.

Linghu Chong was in shock, completely astonished by the unusual scene.

"If we don't drink horse blood, how do we gain our strength for more fights?" Xiang Wentian said again.

"More fights?" Linghu Chong muttered.

“Are you afraid?” Xiang Wentian asked.

Linghu Chong’s heroic spirit soared at once. He let out a few loud laughs and replied, “What do you think?”

Moving his mouth next to the horse neck, he felt the horse blood gushing toward his throat. Without hesitation, he swallowed it down. At first, the horse blood tasted with a strong fishy smell, but after several mouthful of it, it no longer smelled that bad. Linghu Chong drank over a dozen mouthful of horse blood one after another and did not move his mouth away until he felt completely full in his stomach. Xiang Wentian followed suit and drank more blood. Before long, the horse could no longer hold out and collapsed in long, painful neighs. Raising his left foot, Xiang Wentian booted the horse into the ravine.

Linghu Chong gasped with astonishment. The horse, a large beast, weighed at least five hundred pounds. He almost couldn’t believe his eyes when he watched Xiang Wentian booting it into the ravine with such a casual kick.

After booting the second horse into the ravine, Xiang Wentian turned around and threw a knife hand chop at the third horse, which chopped one of the hind legs off the horse. In the same way, he chopped the other hind leg off. The horse neighed deafeningly; even after it was booted into the ravine by Xiang Wentian’s kick, the painful neighs continued on.

“This leg is yours! If you eat it slowly, there should be enough for ten day’s worth,” Xiang Wentian said.

By then, Linghu Chong finally came to realization that Xiang Wentian had only chopped the hind legs off for food and wasn’t being brutal simply for the fun of it. So he took a horse leg in compliance and once Xiang Wentian began climbing the mountain path with a horse leg in his hand, he followed behind quietly.

Xiang Wentian slowed down his paces and walked unhurriedly. Because Linghu Chong had lost all his internal strength, only half a mile into the walk, he was already falling

far behind, wheezing uncontrollably, his face turning completely pale, and Xiang Wentian had to stop to wait for him. After another mile or so, Linghu Chong couldn't walk any further and had to sit down to catch his breath.

"Little brother, you are certainly very unusual. Your inner strength is so terrible, however, after taking two hits from Yue Hou that scumbag's Great Yin-Yang Palm strikes, you look as though nothing had happened to you. This is really beyond me," Xiang Wentian remarked.

"What makes you think nothing happened to me? My internal organs have all turned upside down from the shockwave, and who knows how many dozens of internal injuries it must have inflicted upon me. You know, I was just wondering about this thing myself? How come I am still not dead yet? Maybe I'll be collapsing down any second now and not be able to ever get up again," Linghu Chong replied with a wry grin.

"Well, let's rest a bit longer then," Xiang Wentian said.

At first, Linghu Chong had wanted to explain to Xiang Wentian that there was really no need to wait for him any longer and let the enemies catch up with Xiang Wentian, since he wasn't going to live for long any way, but then thought better of it. Xiang Wentian was a heroic man; he would never have abandoned him so he could flee for his own life. If he had said something along that line, he would have really insulted Xiang Wentian.

"Little brother, how did you lose your internal strength?" Xiang Wentian sat down on a big rock and asked.

"Well, this is a very funny story." Linghu Chong let out a light grin and began explaining in short how he had been injured, how the Peach Valley's Six Fairies injected their inner energy into his body in an attempt to heal him, and how Monk No Commandment injected more inner energy into his body later.

"I've never heard of anything weirder than this one!" Xiang Wentian broke into a loud laugh, and his thunderous

laughter echoed round the valley.

Suddenly, sound of loud bawling rose from a distance amongst Xiang Wentian's loud laughter.

"Xiang Wentian, you can't run away. You'd better behave yourself and surrender now."

But Xiang Wentian kept laughing out loud. "Funny! Very funny! The Peach Valley's Six Fairies and the Monk No Commandment are all first-class idiots!" he exclaimed. After another three laughs, he knitted his brows and scolded, "God damn it! Large crowd of bastards have caught up with us."

He reached out and picked Linghu Chong up into his arms. Having no spare hand to carry the horse leg, he left it by the side of the road and began running. Once he picked up speed, Linghu Chong felt as though he was flying above the cloud. And soon after, Linghu Chong suddenly found himself inside a vast expanse of whiteness - they had actually run into a large cloud of mist.

"Wonderful!" Linghu Chong thought to himself. "We've climbed onto a peak. Now those several hundred people can't charge forward altogether. As long as they fight us one on one, this Mr. Xiang and I, for sure, can deal with it."

The shouting behind them came closer and closer. Apparently the people right behind them were also masters in Qing-Gong. Even though their Qing-Gong skills were inferior to that of Xiang Wentian's, carrying a man in his arms, Xiang Wentian unavoidably slowed down after running for an extensive period of time.

After reaching a turning corner of the road, Xiang Wentian placed Linghu Chong on the ground and whispered, "Be quiet."

Both of them stood quietly, pressing their backs against the precipice wall. Only a moment later, sounds of footsteps rose as someone closed in. The men in pursuit dashed at full speed. In the thick mist, neither of them saw Xiang Wentian or Linghu Chong. Only after they had run pass the side of them did they notice the two of them, and before they had a

chance to stop and turn around, Xiang Wentian had struck out with his two palms. The palm strike was both resolute and accurate. The two men fell into the ravine without even a groan, and a short while later, two muffled flops came as their bodies hit the bottom of the ravine.

“Why didn’t these two scream when they were falling?” Linghu Chong asked himself. “Oh, I see. Before they fell down, the force from the palm strike had killed them instantly.”

“Those two scumbags loved to swagger around, calling themselves ‘The Diancang School Duo Swordsmen, Forces of Sword Towering the Heaven.’ Now they can rot in the abyss, their stinks towering the Heaven! Ha-ha!” Xiang Wentian sneered.

Linghu Chong had heard the fame of the “Diancang School Duo Swordsmen” mentioned to him before. He heard that the two men had excellent sword skills and had slain many formidable outlaws. Little had he expected to see them die so muddleheaded here today and didn’t even get a chance to see their faces.

“There are still about five miles from here to Xianchou Gorge. Once we get to the gorge, we won’t have to worry about those scumbags any more,” picking Linghu Chong up once again, Xiang Wentian said.

He resumed running with faster and faster paces, but sounds of footsteps rose from behind as several more people began catching up with them. At the time, the mountain path turned eastward and no longer had the cliff by the side. Xiang Wentian couldn’t play the same old trick again by hiding next to the precipice wall for sneak attacks and could only keep running with all his strength.

A swooshing sound suddenly broke out as a projectile flew toward Xiang Wentian’s back. It sounded loud and strong – apparently the projectile was something very heavy. Xiang Wentian put Linghu Chong on the ground and turned around, catching the projectile in the air.

"Mr. He, when did you decide to get involved with this? Has this gotten anything to do with you?" he cursed.

"You have become the bane of the Martial World, and everyone has the very right to kill you. Now take this flying awl from me," a voice shouted from within the mist followed by continuous swooshing sounds. He had said "this flying awl" but at least seven or eight flying awls had been shot forward.

Hearing the loud and shrill sounds made by the projectiles tearing through air, Linghu Chong was deeply concerned.

"Even though the sword techniques taught by Grand Uncle-Master Feng can be used to block any projectiles or missiles, the forces carried by the awls are simply too strong. I can hit them, but the tremendous force would break the sword for sure," he thought to himself.

He cast a glance at Xiang Wentian, who was now squatting in a horse stance, his upper body leaning forward slightly, his face looking nervous, very different from the unconcerned face he had had when he was still in the pavilion surrounded by hundreds of enemies. When the flying awls reached Xiang Wentian, they silenced one after another. Linghu Chong figured that they must have all been caught by Xiang Wentian. All of a sudden, many swooshing sounds broke out all together as numerous awls were shot out at once. Linghu Chong knew that this was a projectile throwing technique named "Raindrops All Over the Sky." Normally when someone shot projectiles using this technique, the projectile he used must have been small ones such as coin-darts, or iron lotus seeds. Judging from the loud sounds made by the flying awls, each one had to be at least half a pound, if not a full pound. How could dozens of them be shot out at once? After hearing the loud and shrill sounds, he took a prone spontaneously, and then he heard a loud "ouch" from Xiang Wentian as though he had been wounded

severely. In great astonishment he leapt forward and hid Xiang Wentian behind his back.

"Mr. Xiang, are you wounded?" he asked hurriedly.

"I...I won't make it. You...you...you'd better run...for yourself...." Xiang Wentian replied in fits and starts.

"We live and die together. Linghu Chong won't abandon you just to save his own life!" Linghu Chong replied loudly.

"Xiang Wentian has been hit by the flying awls!" the chasing enemies shouted out loudly and dimly, over a dozen shadows closed in upon them little by little.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong felt a strong gust blowing past him by his right side, then came Xiang Wentian's loud laughter as the dozen shadows in front collapsed to the ground. Turned out that Xiang Wentian caught the dozens of flying awls all into his hands but pretended to get hit, then when the enemies were off guard, he shot the many flying awls back also using the "Raindrops All Over the Sky" technique. Because they were in a very heavy mist and no one could see clearly, besides, Linghu Chong's worried voice was completely sincere, so every one of the chasing enemies believed it wholeheartedly, in addition, no one had expected that Xiang Wentian was also capable of shooting out such heavy projectiles using the "Raindrops All Over the Sky" technique, so none of the dozen or so people at the front was able to dodge the attack, resulting in several dead corpses and severe injuries for the rest of them.

Xiang Wentian picked up Linghu Chong and turned around to run once again.

"Very good! Little brother! You are a good brother," he praised, thinking to himself that when Linghu Chong had stepped forward to defend him recklessly, it could be accounted to the eccentric temper of a young man, but when he pretended to be wounded severely a moment ago, Linghu Chong would not run for his own life and was determined to live or die together with him. That was indeed the most precious virtue in the Martial World - "code of brotherhood."



After a short while, once again, the enemies gained on them bit by bit. Swooshing sounds resumed continuously as projectiles, darts were pelted toward them nonstop. Because Xiang Wentian had to keep bending over or jumping up and down to dodge them, the enemies were able to quickly shorten the distance.

Putting Linghu Chong down on the ground, Xiang Wentian suddenly dashed into the chasing crowd with a loud roar. Several loud clanking sounds exploded and Xiang Wentian quickly returned, not just by himself, but also with a man on his back. After tying the man's hands with his iron chain and carrying him on his back, Xiang Wentian placed Linghu Chong back in his arms and resumed running.

"We've got ourselves a live shield!" he grinned.

"Stop shooting projectiles! Stop shooting projectiles!" the man screamed loudly, but the chasing enemies ignored his plea and kept shooting projectiles and darts forward.

"Ouch!" the man suddenly groaned loudly as a projectile hit him on the back.

With both the live shield on his back and Linghu Chong in his arms, Xiang Wentian kept running with good agility, while the man on his back cursed loudly.

"Wang Conggu, damn you, you son of a gun. You know it's me...ouch! It's a sleeve-arrow!<sup>62</sup> God damn it! Zhang Furong, you bitch! You...you are just getting back on me, aren't you?"

After some continuous popping sound, the man's cussing voice went lower and lower gradually, and eventually fell silent.

"Oops, our live shield is a dead shield now," Xiang Wentian grinned.

Without any scruples for projectiles, Xiang Wentian ran as fast as he could and after turning two mountain ridges, he finally said, "We are here!" Letting out a long breath, he broke into loud laughter, his mind completely free from any worries. The last five miles of running was extremely

dangerous. He really had had no confidence that he would be able to shake off the chasing enemies.

Linghu Chong scanned the surroundings widely and felt a slight surprise. A narrow stone beam lay in front of his eyes, leading into a bottomless abyss. The stone beam only had a visible part of eight or nine feet long; anything further was completely concealed in thick mist. He couldn't tell how long the stone beam was and where it led to.

"It's an iron chain in the mist. Don't step onto it carelessly," Xiang Wentian whispered.

"Got it," Linghu Chong answered, his heart thumping rapidly. "This stone beam's width is no wider than a foot with a bottomless abyss right below it. This is already extremely dangerous. With an iron chain in the place of the stone beam, it is impossible for me to cross it with my current Kung Fu," he thought inwardly.

Xiang Wentian untied the iron chain around the hands of the "dead shield," and then drew a long sword by the man's waist and handed it over to Linghu Chong. Placing the "shield" in front of himself, he waited for the enemies silently. Within a few minutes, the first block of enemies had arrived. Among them were both members of the Demon's Cult and members of the orthodox schools. Seeing the precipitous terrain and Xiang Wentian's "fighting with one's back to the river"<sup>63</sup> stance, none of them was bold enough to charge forward. After a while, more and more enemies arrived. Gathering at about fifty or sixty feet away from Linghu Chong and Xiang Wentian, they shouted their curses for a while and began shooting all kinds of projectiles, darts, migratory locust rocks, sleeve-arrows, and so on and so on. Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong hid behind the "shield" and none of the projectiles could reach them.

Suddenly, a thunderous roar blasted as a boorish mendicant monk charged forward, leaving booming echoes reverberating in the deep valley. The mendicant monk smacked his over seventy-pound iron Buddhist staff toward

Xiang Wentian's waist. Xiang Wentian bent forward and swung his iron horizontally barely above the ground simultaneously. By the time the Buddhist staff passed by from above his head, his iron chain also swept toward the mendicant monk's right ankle. The mendicant monk had put great strength into the smack and could not draw the staff back in time to block the iron chain; having no other choice, he leapt upward to dodge it. But Xiang Wentian's iron chain suddenly turned around, wrapped around the mendicant monk's right ankle, and swung upward, following the mendicant monk's upward momentum using his own force against him. The mendicant monk lost his balance at the landing and tottered forward only finding himself falling toward the bottomless abyss. With a snap of his wrist, Xiang Wentian unwrapped his iron chain from the mendicant monk's ankle. Miserable screams echoed as the mendicant monk fell down and continued all the way down into the abyss, which made the hairs on the back of everybody's neck standing on their ends as they took several steps back spontaneously.

The deadlock lasted for a good while until two men finally stepped forward. One had a pair of halberds and the other one was a monk, holding a crescent spade in his hands. The two men launched their attack shoulder to shoulder: the two halberds, one on the top and the other one below it, struck toward Xiang Wentian's face and lower abdomen while the crescent spade struck forward aiming at his left rib cage. All three weapons were the heavy type, and with resourceful inner energy attached to them, they appeared to be ultra powerful. The two men had the landform in their minds when they launched the attack so that Xiang Wentian would not be able to dodge to the side and would have no choice but to block the attack with his iron chain in a contest of strength. Sure enough, Xiang Wentian waved his iron chain and with three loud bangs, knocked the two halberds and the crescent spade back. Sparkles flew in all directions from all four

weapons, proving that this round of fight was sheer strength against sheer strength and there was no room for any trickery. Loud cheers exploded in the audiences at once.

After their weapons were knocked aside by the iron chain, the two men launched another wave of attack. Three loud bangs exploded again as the four weapons collided with each other. Both the monk and the man wobbled a few times from the collision of the forces, but Xiang Wentian stood firmly, and before his enemies even had a chance to take a breather, Xiang Wentian roared in a deafening voice, striking out his iron chain rapidly. In a hurry, the two men each raised his weapon to block. Three deafening bangs broke out once again, short and quick. The monk snarled loudly and threw his crescent spade to his side, when all of a sudden blood spurted out from his mouth. The other man raised his two halberds and stabbed them toward Xiang Wentian. Instead of blocking the approaching halberds, Xiang Wentian squared his shoulders and laughed out loud. When the tips of the halberds were still half a foot from Xiang Wentian's chest, they suddenly sank weakly, and following the fall of the halberds, the man also fell forward to the ground and became motionless. Turned out that he had been shaken to death by Xiang Wentian's overwhelming strength. The many people gathered in front of the gorge stared at each other in terror and none had the courage to step up.

"Little brother, we'll just drag it on with them. Why don't you sit down and have a rest?" Xiang Wentian suggested.

At that word, he sat down himself, embracing his own knees into his arms and casting not a glance toward the crowd.

"Audacious devil, how dare you belittle all the worldly heroes like that?" Someone suddenly spoke loudly.

Naked blades in their hands, four Taoist Priests stepped out from the crowd and walked in front of Xiang Wentian, all four swords turning crosswise in unison. "Get up, let's fight!" they yelled.

“What did Xiang Wentian do to have provoked your Emei School?” Xiang Wentian said coldly with a sneer.

“Evil demons and heretics are misfortunes of the Martial World. We Taoist Priests believe in cultivation of moral character and promotion of righteousness. Eradicating the wicked and destroying the evil is our duty,” a Taoist Priest on the left stated.

“Eradicating the wicked and destroying the evil is your duty, indeed! Look at the people behind you. Half of them are members of the ‘Demon’s Cult,’ why aren’t you eradicating the wicked and destroying the evil?” Xiang Wentian mocked with a grin.

“The principle culprit first!” the Taoist Priest answered.

But Xiang Wentian remained his sitting position, his knees in his arms. “Oh, I see. Very well, very well!” he said as he held up his head and stared at the floating clouds indifferently.

Suddenly Xiang Wentian leapt up in a loud roar and swung his iron chain, which swept toward the four men’s waist speedily like a mounting dragon. This surprise attack came so abruptly and would have worked if the four Taoist Priests weren’t top-notch fighters of the Emei School. Hastily, three Taoist Priests planted their long swords downward in front of their waists while the fourth Taoist Priest on the right most thrust his sword directly at Xiang Wentian’s throat.

“Clank!” the three long swords bent all together from the iron chain’s heavy strike while Xiang Wentian inclined his head and avoid the stab from the forth sword. Waving his sword about swiftly, the fourth Taoist Priest immediately followed with three incessant sword attacks, which stalled Xiang Wentian just long enough, while the rest three Taoist Priest retreated back and rejoined the battle after replacing their long swords. The sword moves from the four Taoist Priests coordinated with each other as though they had put up a small sword formation. Four swords fluttered gracefully in the air, gathering in one second then dividing in the next.

Linghu Chong watched the fight for a little while and soon realized that Xiang Wentian had to move both of his hands together every time when he waved the iron chain about, which was far slower compared to the agility he would have achieved had he been able to moving his hands freely, and as the fight dragged on longer, a defeat would be simply inevitable. Taking a step forward from Xiang Wentian's right side, he thrust his sword out, aiming toward a Taoist Priest's ribs. The direction and position of the thrust was most peculiar. The Taoist Priest had no way of evading it, and with a slight thump, he took a hit on the side of his body.

At that exact instant, a thought flashed by Linghu Chong's mind like a lightning, "I've heard that people of the Emei School has always preserved their moral integrity with an extremely fine reputation, paying no attention to other people's business in the Martial World. I'll help Mr. Xiang out of the predicament, but I shall not kill the Taoist Priest."

So as soon as the tip of his sword pierced the Taoist Priest's skin, Linghu Chong pulled his sword back at once. But because of this hard pull out of a sudden impulse, the sword move became deficient, and to his surprise, the Taoist Priest brought his elbow inward in an attempt to hold the long sword under his arms with force in spite of the great pain. Linghu Chong gave the sword a tug and the blade of the sword instantly left a long cut on the man's arm and the side of his body, but because of this slight holdup, another Taoist Priest's long sword had already struck over and smacked onto Linghu Chong's sword.

Linghu Chong felt his entire arm going numb and almost let go of the sword, but knowing that without his sword, he would have become a disabled person, he held onto the sword handle desperately as waves of force reached him through the long sword and crushed toward his heart channel in multiple bursts.

When the first Taoist Priest took a stab under his arms, the injury had not been very serious, but then when he

brought his elbow inward to hold the long sword with his arms, Linghu Chong's tug created a cut so deep that even his bones were exposed. Blood spurted out from the wound, which basically forced him out of the fight. The rest two Taoist Priest were both behind Linghu Chong's back by now, fighting a fierce battle with Xiang Wentian. The two Taoist Priests had fine and marvelous swords moves, and the two swords worked in coordination, putting up an extremely tight defense shield.

In every few moves, Xiang Wentian would take a step backward, thus after ten steps or so, his entire body was already inside the white mist. But the two Taoist Priests kept charging forward, and soon the front half of their long swords also disappeared in the heavy mist.

"Watch out! It's the Iron Chain Bridge down there," someone in the crowd suddenly shouted out, but that was too late. The two Taoist Priest screeched in terror as both of them plunged forward into the white mist, obviously being pulled forward involuntarily by Xiang Wentian. Sound of scream sank rapidly into the valley and fell silent only seconds later.

Laughing out loudly, Xiang Wentian emerged out from behind the white mist, but his laughter halted abruptly when he caught sight of a tottering Linghu Chong.

Back at the pavilion, the four Taoist Priests of the Emei School had witnessed how Linghu Chong injured his opponents one after another with the "Dugu Nine Swords" and knew very well that they would be no match for him in a contest of sword arts. But they were also able to tell that Linghu Chong's inner strength was plain ordinary. Now when the Taoist Priest shot his inner strength toward Linghu Chong wave after wave, even if Linghu Chong were still in the same state of health before he was injured, his cultivation of inner strength would have been very shallow, after all, due to limited amount of training, and would have stood no change against the Taoist Priest's over thirty years worth of inner

strength cultivation using the breathing techniques of the Emei School, much less that Linghu Chong had lost all his inner strength. Fortunately, he had abundant other people's inner energy inside him, which enabled him to withstand the energy attack for a little while and protected him from an instant injury. However, he still felt the energy streams inside him rolling and clashing against each other over and over as golden sparks twinkled in front of his eyes. Suddenly, he felt a stream of hot energy penetrating his back through the "Da-Zhui Acupoint" and the stress coming from his hand lightened at once.

Linghu Chong's spirit surged. He knew that Xiang Wentian must have lent him a helping hand. Then he immediately realized that Xiang Wentian had redirected the attacking energy force downward so it would flow from his arm to his waist, then to his heels, and eventually dissolving into the ground.

The Taoist Priest felt the sudden dissolution of his attacking energy force. He let out a loud yell and leapt backward, withdrawing his own sword.

"It's the Evil Art of Essence Absorbing! It's the Evil Art of Essence Absorbing!" he cried out loud.

At the mentioning of the phrase "Evil Art of Essence Absorbing," many in the crowd changed their countenances.

"That's right! It's the Magical Art of Essence Absorbing. Now who else is interested to try it out?" Xiang Wentian said with a broad grin.

"Could that Ren...Ren...have come out again?" the Demon's Cult Elder with a yellow waistband muttered in a croaked voice. "Let's report back to the Chief and let him decide," he ordered.

The Demon's Cult members acknowledged the command in chorus and all turned around to leave. After a short moment, half of the crowd of several hundred people had dispersed away. The rest people of the orthodox schools talked among themselves in whispers for a little while, and



then also began to disperse one after another. In the end, only a dozen or so people remained.

“Xiang Wentian, Linghu Chong! By using the Evil Art of Essence Absorbing, you have sunk beyond redemption. Hereafter, when fellow members of the Martial World cope with the two of you, we no longer restrict ourselves to only just means. You have only yourselves to blame for such a consequence. I hope you won’t regret today when that happens,” a clear voice declared.

“When did I ever regret for what I did? Are you saying that it is actually a just means for the several hundreds of you to jointly attack the two of us? How funny is that! Ha-ha!” Xiang Wentian replied in laughter.

Sounds of footsteps rose and soon the remaining dozen or so people also vanished from sight. Xiang Wentian inclined the head and listened carefully. When he was sure that the enemies had indeed walked away, he whispered to Linghu Chong.

“I bet you these bastards will come back in no time. Come here and get on my back.”

Seeing the solemn expression on Xiang Wentian’s face, Linghu Chong decided to simply comply without asking any questions and climbed onto Xiang Wentian’s back. To his slight astonishment, Xiang Wentian bent down, extended his left foot forward slowly, and began walking down the deep valley.

Xiang Wentian swung his iron chain out and wrapped the end of it around a tree bough by the edge of the cliff that protruded beyond the cliff. After verifying that the bough was strong enough to hold the combined weight for both of them, he jumped down gently, and the two of them were now hanging in the midair. Xiang Wentian swung back and forth a few times. As soon as he found a spot to set his feet, he snapped his wrist with a reverse swing, which unwrapped the iron chain from the bough. After pressing down on the mountain wall with his hands to stabilize himself for a brief

second, Xiang Wentian immediately swung out the iron chain again, and this time, it wrapped around a protruding rock underneath them, thus, they were able to descend another ten feet. Using the same technique, they descended further and further down the deep valley. Sometimes when there was only bare mountain wall without any trees or protruding rocks, Xiang Wentian would then run the risk by keeping his body close to the mountain wall and simply slide downward. Each slide would run about one hundred feet. As the slide accelerated, as soon as Xiang Wentian saw a spot that could be used to leverage the slide, he would use his outstanding Kung Fu skills, sometimes striking down with his palms, sometimes stomping with his feet, to slow down the slide.

This was certainly a very stunning experience for Linghu Chong. The danger and risk of sliding down the cliff was really no less than the danger and risk in the fierce battle a moment ago. This kind of experience was indeed peculiar and risky to the extreme. If he had not met an eccentric like Xiang Wentian, it probably would never happen in one hundred incarnations. So when Xiang Wentian's feet touched the bottom of the valley in the end, he was actually slightly disappointed and wished that the valley were another thousand feet deeper. He looked up at the top of the valley. The stone beam looked like a thin blurry shadow, and white clouds concealed everything else.

"Mr. Xiang...", Linghu Chong said, but Xiang Wentian reached his hand out quickly and covered Linghu Chong's mouth while pointing his right index finger upwards.

Linghu Chong understood at once. The enemies must have returned. But when he looked up as far as he could, he didn't see any shadow on the stone beam.

Xiang Wentian drew his arm back. Placing his ear right next to the mountain wall, he listened attentively. After quite a while, he finally said with a grin, "God damn it! Some are taking guards while some others are searching all over the place." Turning toward Linghu Chong, he goggled at him for a

moment and then spoke again, "You are an apprentice of a famous, orthodox school. I, on the other hand, am a so-called evil heretic. The two sides have always been mortal enemies. Why were you willing to offend your friends at the orthodox schools and come to save my life with no regard for your own safety?"

"I just happened to be at the place at the nick of time and were able to join forces with you, Mr. Xiang, and contended with the many elite fighters of both the orthodox schools and the Demon's Cult. I had not expected to come through this alive. I must have had incredible luck on my side. What you said about me saving your life is really...well, well...is really..." Linghu Chong replied.

"Is really rubbish, isn't it?" Xiang Wentian finished the sentence for him.

"I dare not say Mr. Xiang is talking rubbish. But it would be completely incorrect if you say that I saved your life," Linghu Chong answered.

"Xiang Wentian never goes back on his own words! I said that you saved my life, then you did save my life," Xiang Wentian concluded.

Linghu Chong let out a smile and did not argue.

"Just now, those god damned bastards kept yelling about the 'Magical Art of Essence Absorbing' and were scared out of their wits. Do you know what kind of Kung Fu this 'Magical Art of Essence Absorbing' is? And why are they so afraid of it?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"Linghu Chong, a junior, is just about to ask for your advice, Mr. Xiang," Linghu Chong replied.

"Drop the junior, senior, elder, mister crap, will you? That's really getting on my nerves. You can simply call me Brother Xiang, and I'll call you Brother Linghu," Xiang Wentian said with a frown.

"Linghu Chong dare not do so," Linghu Chong declined.

"I see! You despise me because I am part of the Demon's Cult. You've saved my life, but my life is the least concern on

my mind. If you despise me, we can dispute this over a fight," Xiang Wentian exclaimed angrily. Though he spoke these words in a muffled voice, the anger blazing on his face clearly showed his irritation.

"There's no need for a fight. If Brother Xiang insists, of course I'll comply," Linghu Chong replied with a beam. He thought to himself, "Didn't I make friends with the evil rapist Tian Boguang? Might as well add Xiang Wentian to my list of friends. This man was free and easy and holds the characteristics of a true man. I've always liked people with such demeanors." At that thought, he bowed down and saluted Xiang Wentian, saying, "Brother Xiang, I salute you."

Xiang Wentian's face split into a wide smile. "Just bear in mind that you are the only sworn brother Xiang Wentian ever had in the entire world," he added.

"I am extremely flattered!" Linghu Chong grinned.

According to the tradition in the Martial World, when two men became sworn brothers, they should at least get on their knees, pinch some soil in front of them in place of the incense sticks, and then swear an oath along the line of sticking together through thick and thin and sharing weal and woe. But since both of them were the unconventional type, and after going through this fierce battle together, each found the other congenial with the utmost sincerity, neither bothered about the over elaborate formalities. Once they called each other a sworn brother, then sworn brothers they were.

Xiang Wentian was a member of the Demon's Cult, but there were very few fellow cult members he would think much of. Having made Linghu Chong his sworn brother, he found himself in a state of bliss.

"Too bad we don't have any wine here, or else we could have drunk twenty or thirty bowls of god damned liquor to celebrate!" Xiang Wentian grumbled.

"Absolutely!" Linghu Chong immediately agreed. "My throat had been itching madly from the cravings. Now that

you mentioned it, it only got worse.”

“Those bastards haven’t left yet. I guess we’ll just have to hold out for a few days at the bottom of the valley,” Xiang Wentian suggested, pointing his finger upward. “Brother, just now, when that cow-nose of the Emei School attacked you with his inner energy, what happened to the cow-nose’s inner energy force when I helped you with my inner strength?” he asked.

“Brother Xiang, I felt as though you redirected that Taoist Priest’s inner energy force into the ground,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Yes, yes!” Xiang Wentian smacked his own thigh in excitement. “Brother, your comprehension is excellent. This Kung Fu of mine was something I created by chance and nobody else in the Martial World knew about it. I gave it a name and called it the ‘Minor Art of the Energy Absorbing to the Ground’.”

“That’s a strange name!” Linghu Chong uttered.

“Well,” Xiang Wentian explained, “that’s because the ‘Magical Art of Essence Absorbing’ can change the countenance on anyone’s face in the Martial World just by the sound of it, and this Kung Fu of mine would pale into utter insignificance in comparison with it. That’s why I had to call it a ‘Minor Art.’ This Kung Fu of mine only utilizes simple techniques to graft one twig on another and redirects the opponent’s attacking inner force to the ground instead of causing any harm. I don’t have the least gain from it, myself. Besides, this Kung Fu is only useful when the opponent is attacking with his inner energy and can’t be used to attack in offense. At the time when the opponent suddenly felt that his inner energy was discharging in a steady stream, undoubtedly he would turn pale with fright, but it doesn’t take long for that amount of inner energy to regenerate. Why was I so sure that they would definitely return? Because as soon as the cow-nose found out that he didn’t really lose any bit of his essence, he would know that my ‘Minor Art of

Energy Absorbing to the Ground' is only bluffing and there's nothing dreadful about it. I never liked playing deceiving tricks, that's why I never used it before."

"Xiang Wentian never deceives people, but for his sworn brother's sake, he made an exception today," Linghu Chong grinned.

"Nah, I wouldn't say that I never deceive people. But for insignificant players like that Priest Song-Wen, I would really disdain to deceive him," Xiang Wentian showed a grin before continuing. "If I want to deceive someone for some reason, it has to be something huge, something earthshaking, something everybody will be talking about afterwards."

At those words, the two of them broke into laughter. Even though they held their laughter low so as not to be heard by the enemy above, but the laugh was thoroughly delighted.

# **Chapter 19: The Wager**

## **Translated by Lanny Lin**





**Mr. Black-White extended his index finger and middle finger rapidly and gripped towards the blade of the thrusting sword. The five spectators couldn't help letting out a cry of surprise.**

By now both of them were very exhausted, and each took a spot to sit in repose with their eyes closed, leaning against a big rock. Soon Linghu Chong began to doze off. In the sleep, he suddenly saw Ying-Ying placing three roasted frogs into his hands and asking him, "Have you forgotten me?"

"I have not! I have not! Where...where have you been?" Linghu Chong replied loudly. But all of a sudden, Ying-Ying's image vanished before his eyes. "Don't go! I have a lot to tell you," he shouted hastily. But all he could see now were countless of knives, swords, and various weapons striking toward him one after another. He cried out loudly and then woke up.

"Have you dreamed of your sweetheart and had a lot to tell her?" Xiang Wentian said with a big grin.

Linghu Chong's face went red. He wasn't sure what else he had said in his dream that Xiang Wentian might also overheard.

"Brother, if you want to see your lover, you'll have to recuperate your injury and cure yourself before going looking for her," Xiang Wentian suggested.

"I...I don't have a lover. Besides, my injury is incurable," Linghu Chong replied, his face looking gloomy.

"I owe you a life. Although you are my sworn brother, it still doesn't feel right, and I simply must repay you with a life. I'll take you to a place. There, you will be cured," Xiang Wentian exclaimed.

Linghu Chong had long disregarded his own life, but that was really because he didn't have a choice after all and had to treat it with indifference. Now when he heard Xiang Wentian saying that his injury was actually curable, a mixed feeling of hope and bliss began swelling in his chest. If these words had come out of someone else's mouth, he would not

have let his hope go up. But Xiang Wentian was a man with extraordinary abilities, and his Kung Fu skills were so amazing that other than Grand Uncle-Master Feng, Linghu Chong had not seen anyone possessing such exceptional skills. Even a casual remark from him could have weighed more than a thousand pounds.

"I...I...", Linghu Chong murmured but found himself lost in word from the sudden surge of spirit.

By now, the crescent shaped moon had climbed up the opening of the valley and shone over it silently, casting rays of cold light into the bottom of the valley. Although the valley bottom still looked dark and gloomy, in Linghu Chong's eyes, everything seemed to have brightened up all of a sudden as though it was sunshine everywhere.

"We'll go see a man. But this man has a very eccentric temperament, so it's better that we don't let him know beforehand. Brother, if you trust me, just let me arrange everything," Xiang Wentian explained.

"What's there to not trust? Brother Xiang, your trying to cure my injury is just like that old saying, 'Working on curing a dead horse as though the horse was still alive.' It was a hopeless thing to start with anyway. If it can be cured, then praise the lord! If it can't be cured, then it is just the way it should have been."

Xiang Wentian licked his lips at these words. "I wonder where we dropped that horse leg. God dammit! We killed so many bastards, and there's not even a single one down here."

From the expression on Xiang Wentian's face, Linghu Chong could tell that he must be thinking about finding some corpses for food. Gasping with astonishment, he dared not say another word and closed his eyes to sleep.

The next morning, Xiang Wentian said, "Brother, other than moss and grass, there's nothing here. If we stay here and drag on like this, we've got to find some dead corpses for food. But the ones that fell down the valley yesterday were

all old and stringy. I think you won't have too good of an appetite eating those."

"I won't have any appetite at all," Linghu Chong replied hurriedly.

Xiang Wentian grinned. "Then we'll have to find a way out of here. Let me change your looks a little bit."

He scooped some slime from the ground and smeared it onto Linghu Chong's face. Then he put his hands on his own chins and rubbed. As soon as his inner strength radiated out from his palms, his long beards began falling off completely. Next, he placed his hands on his own head and rubbed, and soon all the gray hair on his head also fell off entirely, turning his head into a shiny, bald head.

Within moments, he had changed his appearance completely. Linghu Chong found it amusing yet amazing. Xiang Wentian scooped some more slime and then made his nose bigger, his chins chubbier. Now even if someone looked at Xiang Wentian carefully face to face, he would still have a difficult time recognizing him.

Xiang Wentian leading the way, they began looking for a way out of the valley. Xiang Wentian put his hands together and hid them in the sleeves, which also covered up the iron chain tied around his wrists. As long as he didn't draw his hands out, nobody would have been able to recognize that this bald fatty was actually the hale, hearty, and degage Xiang Wentian.

The two of them explored the valley from one side to the other, and by noon, they caught sight of a small, wild peach tree in a small col. Even though the peaches were far from ripe and tasted sour and astringent, they couldn't care less and each had a stomach full. After resting for about two hours, they resumed their walk. By the time of dusk, Xiang Wentian finally found the right place to get out of the valley, only that they had to climb over a precipice a few hundred feet high. Xiang Wentian carried Linghu Chong on his back and then climbed upward.

After they climbed up the cliff, a small path appeared in front of their eyes, winding through the long grasses covering the wild country land. Although the scenery was bleak, at least they had gotten out of the tight spot where even traces of wild birds or animals were lacking, and both heaved a long sigh of relieve.

The next morning, they traveled east. When they finally arrived at a good-sized town, Xiang Wentian took out a piece of Golden Leaf<sup>64</sup> from his chest pocket and asked Linghu Chong to exchange that into silver at a local money market. When that was all taken care of, they put up at an inn. Xiang Wentian ordered a lavish feast and also asked the servant to bring out a big jar of wine. The two of them both drank to heart's content until over half jar of the wine had gone. Then without paying any attention to the food on the table, one simply fell asleep at the table while the other one fell into a fuddle and passed out in bed. Not until the next morning when the warm sunshine had covered the full window did they wake up one after another. They exchanged a few grins as they recollected the fierce fight inside the pavilion and on the stone beam, almost feeling as though those events had only happened in their last incarnation.

"Brother, you wait here. I'll be right back," Xiang Wentian said.

But Xiang Wentian did not return until over two hours later. Linghu Chong was just starting to worry, fearing that he might have encountered enemies, when Xiang Wentian reappeared with many packages in various sizes in his hands and under his arms. The iron chain that had shackled around his waists also disappeared. He must have asked a blacksmith to chisel it off. Xiang Wentian opened the packages. It turned out each and every one of them contained luxurious garments and apparels.

"We'll disguise into rich merchants. The more extravagant, the better," Xiang Wentian explained.

The two of them changed into the brand new clothes from inside out completely. When they walked outside, the inn servant lead two tall horses in bright saddles and bridles to them which apparently Xiang Wentian had also just purchased. They traveled slowly further east on horsebacks. After two days into the journey, Linghu Chong had already felt worn out, so Xiang Wentian hired a horse-drawn wagon for him to ride in. After arriving by the Grand Canal,<sup>65</sup> they simply gave up the idea of traveling by horse and hired a boat, traveling south by water, instead.

Along the journey, Xiang Wentian kept the spending spree, as though he had infinite number of Golden Leaves with him. After they crossed the Yangtze River, more and more markets and shops bustled along both banks of the canal. The apparels Xiang Wentian purchased also turned more and more extravagant. During the long days spent on the boat, Xiang Wentian told many anecdotes and tales of the Martial World, most of which were stories Linghu Chong had never heard of before and brought great gusto out of him. But if there was anything relating the Dark-Wood Cliff or concerning matters of the Demon's Cult, Xiang Wentian would not mention any word of it, and Linghu Chong would not ask any question, either.

This day, they arrived outside the city of Hangzhou. With extra attention, Xiang Wentian worked on the disguises of Linghu Chong and himself one more time before getting off the boat, then after acquiring two fine horses, they rode into the city of Hangzhou.

The city of Hangzhou, which used to have the name of Lin-An, was the capital city during the Southern-Song Dynasty, and had always been a great place for residence. As soon as they entered the city, they were greeted by boisterous pedestrians crowding the streets shoulder to shoulder while faint music and songs from alleys and courtyards echoing faintly in the background. Linghu Chong followed Xiang Wentian until they had arrived at the bank of

the West Lake, and what greeted his eyes were a beautiful slate of blue water reflecting the blue sky like a huge mirror and the many weeping willows stroking the lake surface with their long soft branches. The magnificent beauty of the scenery could have easily made one wonder if he had just stepped in a fairyland.

“I’ve heard many people say: Suzhou and Hangzhou are Heavens on earth. I’ve never been to Suzhou so have no idea about it. Today, after seeing the West Lake with my own eyes, I have to agree that using Heaven on earth to describe its beauty is certainly no exaggeration,” Linghu Chong exclaimed.

Xiang Wentian showed a smile as his reply and then led Linghu Chong to a remote corner, which, with a small hill on one side and a long causeway separating it from the outer lake on the other, seemed even more secluded and peaceful. The two of them dismounted their horses and then after tying the reins to the willow trees by the bank, they ascended the flight of stone steps leading up the small hill. It seemed as though Xiang Wentian had returned to a formerly visited place and was very familiar with the pathways. After several turns, suddenly, there were plum trees everywhere. Aged boughs slanted to the side with dense branches and leaves on the top, making one wonder what a splendid view it would be in the early spring when they were all covered in the countless of beautiful, snow-white plum blossoms.

They walked through the large stretch of plum forest and then followed the main stone slab path. Soon a large manor with a red gate and white walls came into their view. Once they came closer, Linghu Chong could see two large characters, “Plum Manor,” written outside of the gate; and by the side, the words “signed by Yu Yunwen” were inscribed in smaller fonts. Even though Linghu Chong did not have much education and didn’t know that Yu Yunwen was the famous Southern-Song general that had defeated Jin’s invading

army, he could still sense the vigorous, heroic spirit behind the elegant and graceful handwriting.

Xiang Wentian stepped forward and grabbed onto the shiny copper ring hanging from the gate. "Leave everything to me," he turned his head over his shoulder and whispered.

Linghu Chong nodded, thinking to himself, "This Plum Manor obviously is the residence of a very rich family in the city of Hangzhou. Could this have been the home of an exceptional doctor?" Then he heard Xiang Wentian knocking on the gate using the copper ring. He knocked four times at first then paused for a moment before knocking twice again. Then after another short pause, he knocked five times, then another pause before three more knocks. Letting go of the copper ring, Xiang Wentian took a step back and waited.

After a while, the gate opened slowly, and two old men in servant's clothes walked out abreast. Linghu Chong felt a slight shock at the sight of the two old men. Their eyes shining with sharp stares and their steps steady and firm, apparently both of them had excellent Kung Fu. Why would they allow themselves to be employed to such lowly posts as servants? Linghu Chong couldn't help but ask himself inwardly.

"May I ask what business has brought you to our humble manor?" the man on the left asked with a slight bow.

"Members of the Songshan School and the Huashan School would like to request an audience with the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan,<sup>66</sup> the four respectful Manor Masters," Xiang Wentian said.

"The Manor Masters do not wish to receive any guests," the man replied and made for closing the gate, but Xiang Wentian took something out of his chest pocket and then opened it up.

Linghu Chong felt another shock. Inside Xiang Wentian's hand was a brocade flag in five colors studded with shining pearls and precious gemstones, and in the bright sunlight they twinkled magnificently. Linghu Chong knew that this

flag was the Five Mountains Sword Alliance Command Flag of the Songshan School's Chief Zuo, and wherever the flag showed up, it was as if Chief Zuo had also come, himself, and all members of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance would hold the carrier of the Command Flag to the highest esteem and follow his command strictly.

Linghu Chong faintly felt that this was inappropriate. He was almost sure that Xiang Wentian must have not obtained the flag through proper means. Maybe he had killed some important members of the Songshan School and then had robbed the flag of him, and maybe the flag was the very reason why orthodox school members chased after him. Now he claimed to be a member of the Songshan School, what kind of scheme was he planning to pull? But since Linghu Chong had agreed to let him arrange everything, he had no choice but to maintain his silence and observe by the side.

At the sight of the Command Flag, the two servants' countenance changed slightly. "The Command Flag of Songshan School's Chief Zuo?" they muttered together.

"Yes, it is," Xiang Wentian confirmed.

"The Four Playfellows of Jiangnan and the Five Mountains Sword Alliance never had the chance to make the acquaintance. Even if Songshan School's Chief Zuo had come, himself, our Masters wouldn't necessarily... necessarily...well!" the servant on the right replied. He didn't finish his sentence, but everyone knew what he meant: "Even if Chief Zuo had come, himself, our Masters wouldn't necessarily grant an audience just the same."

Chief Zuo of the Songshan School was, after all, a man of high post and high prestige, and the man did not want to say anything contemptuous. But he apparently considered the status of the "Four Playfellows of the Jiangnan" to be much higher compared to that of the Chief Zuo.

"Who are these 'Four Playfellows of Jiangnan'? Suppose they really have such prestigious status in the Martial World, why have I never heard Master or Master-Wife mention their



names? And when I wondered about the Martial World, I've heard people talking about many exceptional senior masters, how come I've never heard the name 'Four Playfellows of Jiangnan' mentioned before?" Linghu Chong couldn't help but ponder.

"This Command Flag of My Nephew-Apprentice Zuo was only good for bluffing. The four senior masters of Jiangnan are all prestigious masters. Of course they would think nothing of this small flag...." Xiang Wentian showed a slight grin and put the Command Flag back into his chest pocket.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "'Nephew-Apprentice Zuo'? Are you actually pretending to be Chief Zuo's Uncle-Master? This is really getting out of hands."

"I've never had the privilege of paying a formal visit to the four respectful masters of Jiangnan, I just thought that this Command Flag might be used as a token of verification," Xiang Wentian continued.

"Oh," the two servants acknowledged. Hearing how Xiang Wentian had really elevated the position of the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan in his speech, both eased up in the face.

"Are you Chief Zuo's Uncle-Master?" one man asked.

"Yes, I am!" Xiang Wentian let out another grin. "I am only a nobody in the Martial World; naturally you would never have heard about me. But I've long heard about the great feats you have accomplished. Brother Ding, that year at the foot of Mount Qilian, didn't you single-handedly wipe out the entire band of four tyrants and subdued two prestigious Kung Fu masters with a single swing of your sword? And Brother Shi, didn't your Eight-Diagram Golden Saber drink the blood of the Green-Dragon Clan's all thirteen ringleaders on the Han River in Hubei Province just so that you could save the life of an orphan? Such feats are definitely hard to forget."

The two men in servant's clothes were named Ding Jian and Shi Lingwei respectively. Before retiring to the Plum

Manor, they had been two ruthless figures in the Martial World, chivalrous sometimes and wicked some other times. They had one thing in common: seldom had they revealed their names in the many battles they had fought. Consequently, despite their extraordinary martial art skills few had heard of their names. The two incidents Xiang Wentian just brought up were none other than what they had considered the true masterpiece in their lives. In both cases, their opponents had been elite Kung Fu masters and they had to fight many enemies alone, nevertheless each of them claimed a neat victory. Besides, they had been the chivalrous heroes upholding justice while their opponents were the villains in both incidents, which had been very rare occurrences throughout their lives. Generally when someone performs a good deed, even though he wouldn't go out of his way to publicize it, he would still feel utterly pleased if others learn about it accidentally. Both Ding and Shi's faces lit up at Xiang Wentian's words.

"Such trivial matters really do not worth mentioning. Mister, your knowledge of the Martial World is very impressive," Ding Jian spoke with a faint smile.

"The Martial World certainly does not lack people who fish for fame and compliment, but lofty gentlemen with genuine abilities and learning that would rather remain anonymous after doing great deeds are very hard to come by," Xiang Wentian continued. "I've always admired the great fame of 'Straight Line Lightning Sword' Brother Ding and 'Wulu God' Brother Shi. When Nephew-Apprentice Zuo mentioned about consulting the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan in regard to certain matters, I agreed to make the trip to Hangzhou. I figured that even if I might not have the luck to meet the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, as long as I get to meet the 'Straight Line Lightning Sword' and the 'Wulu God,' it would have been a worthy trip. Nephew-Apprentice Zuo said that if he had come, himself, he was afraid that the four senior masters might not want to receive him, having an

aversion to the undeserved reputation he had attained in recent years. But in my case, since I usually stayed in and kept myself away from Martial World matters, maybe I won't look too repugnant in their eyes. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

Very pleased to hear Xiang Wentian flattering both the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan and the two of them, Ding and Shi also accompanied him with a few laughs. Although the bald fatty looked repulsive in appearance, his speech and demeanor showed great manner and elegance, which convinced Ding and Shi that he was not just any ordinary visitor. And since he was Zuo Lengchan's Uncle-Master, his Kung Fu skills had to be extraordinary. Ding and Shi felt their respect growing.

By then, Shi Lingwei had decided to report them to the Manor Masters. Turning toward Linghu Chong, he asked, "Is this mister a member of the Huashan School?"

"This is Brother Feng. He is the Uncle-Master of the current Huashan School Headmaster, Yue Buqun," Xiang Wentian replied swiftly before Linghu Chong had any chance to open his mouth.

From the much nonsense Xiang Wentian had made up, Linghu Chong had guessed that Xiang would vamp up a fake name and identity for him, but he had no idea that Xiang would make him the Uncle-Master of his own Master. Even though Linghu Chong was a man that did not care a rush, pretending to be a senior of his respectful Master made him very uneasy. He couldn't help but shudder. Luckily his face was covered under a thick layer of yellow powder, which effectively concealed his startled face.

Ding Jian and Shi Lingwei exchanged a suspicious stare, both thinking, "Although we can't tell this man's true age, he is most likely under forty. How could he be Yue Buqun's Uncle-Master?"

Xiang Wentian had made Linghu Chong look much older with the help of the disguise. However, Linghu Chong still

looked far from an aged man, and any excessive make up would have given him away completely.

"This Brother Feng here is actually younger than Yue Buqun, but he is the only disciple of apprentice brother Feng Qingyang and the only heir of apprentice brother Feng's unique sword arts. His skills in sword arts are so exceptional that few in the Huashan Sword School could be his match," Xiang Wentian explained.

Once again, Linghu Chong found himself astounded. "How would Brother Xiang know that I am the disciple of Grand Uncle-Master Feng?" he pondered and found the answer only a moment later, "With his exceptional sword art skills, Grand Uncle-Master Feng must have had a prestigious fame in the Martial World many years ago. Brother Xiang is a very knowledgeable man. Once he saw the sword arts I used, naturally he was able to deduce the origin of the sword arts. If Great Master Fang-Sheng can recognize it, so can Brother Xiang."

Ding Jian uttered a cry of surprise. He was an expert in swordsmanship, and upon learning that Linghu Chong was an excellent sword master, he itched for a contest. But the man standing in front of him had such a yellowish, swollen face and a completely wretched look, he had a hard time linking the man to an outstanding master in sword arts.

"May I have the honor to hear your names?" he asked.

"My surname is Tong, and my full name is Tong Huajin. This Brother Feng's first name is Er-Zhong," Xiang Wentian answered.

"We've been looking forward to meeting you for a long time." Both Ding and Shi cupped their hands in greetings.

Xiang Wentian couldn't help but chuckle inwardly. The name he made up, "Tong Huajin," meant copper turning into gold, which, of course, clearly stated that it was fake. And the name "Er-Zhong" simply came from separating the two radicals in the character "Chong." There was no one in the Martial World with any of those two names, yet the two of

them still looked forward to meeting them. Why would they be looking forward to it, much less looking forward to it for a long time already?

“Please come in and have some tea while I report to my Masters. But whether our Masters will see you or not, I won’t promise anything,” Ding Jian said.

“Even though you humbly call yourselves servants of the Manor, you are more like intimate brothers to the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan. I am sure the four senior masters will not go against your suggestions,” Xiang Wentian said with a grin.

Ding Jian returned with a grin, shifting to the side to make way, and Xiang Wentian stepped into the manor, followed closely by Linghu Chong. They walked through a big courtyard following the path, alongside which stood two aged plum trees, one on each side, their limbs extending vigorously in all directions. After entering the reception hall, Shi Lingwei invited the guests to be seated and stood by the side in accompany while Ding Jian went inside to report to the Manor Masters. Seeing that Shi Lingwei stood by the side, Xiang Wentian felt rather irreverent to remain sitting, himself. But Shi was a servant of the Plum Manor, and it would have been inappropriate for him to invite Shi to sit down. And then, he had an idea.

“Brother Feng,” Xiang Wentian said to Linghu Chong, “Look at that painting there. Although it’s made up of only a few simply strokes, it certainly depicts great momentum.” At these words, he stood up and walked in front of the central scroll hung in the middle of the hall.

Having traveled alongside Xiang Wentian for many days, Linghu Chong knew very well that Xiang was not adept at painting and calligraphy despite his resourceful wits. Now when he suddenly began praising the painting, there had to be something more to it. At that thought, he acknowledged with a snort and also walked in front of the painting. The painting contained the drawing of a celestial man’s back. It

almost felt as though the ink on the painting was still dripping wet, clearly showing the powerful vigor of each of the strokes. Even though Linghu Chong was no expert in the art of painting, he could still tell that this had to be a true masterpiece. The autograph on the painting read, "Mr. Paint Splashing Paints In a Big Fuddle." These words were written in a very stern style, as though each brushstroke came from a prod or swing of a long sword.

"Brother Tong, I am very attracted to this word 'Fuddle' on the painting. It almost felt as though the painting and the writing contained some kind of very brilliant sword arts," after staring at the painting for some time, Linghu Chong commented. The brushstrokes in the writing and the gesture of the celestial man seemed to have reminded him of the sword arts carved on the rock wall in the back cave atop the Cliff of Contemplation.

Before Xiang Wentian had a chance to reply, Shi Lingwei had already spoken out, "Mr. Feng is truly an expert in sword arts. Our Fourth Master said: He painted this painting after he became completely inebriated one day and unconsciously included the spirit of sword arts in the artwork. This is the best artwork he had ever created. Once he became sober, he could never paint anything like this again. Mr. Feng can actually make out the spirit of sword arts in the painting. Fourth Master will definitely think of you as a bosom friend. Please allow me to excuse myself so I can report this to him." Beaming with joy, he went inside.

"Brother Feng, turned out you know the art of painting," Xiang Wentian cleared his throat and said.

"I don't know anything about painting. I was just making wild guesses, and happen to hit the target by accident. If this Mr. Paint wants to discuss the art of painting with me, I'll end up making a fool out of myself," Linghu Chong replied.

Suddenly a loud voice rose from outside the door, "Did he really, did he really recognize the spirit of sword arts in my painting? He must be a very insightful man. He must be!"

Amid the clamor, a man entered the room, holding a wine cup in his left hand, his face tipsy and his long beard almost reaching all the way to his bosom.

Shi Lingwei followed right behind the man. In a hurry, he introduced, "These two guests are Mister Tong from the Songshan School and Mister Feng from the Huashan School. This is the Fourth Master of the Plum Manor, Mr. Paint. Fourth Master, as soon as this Mister Feng saw your Splash-Ink painting, he said that the painting contained brilliant sword arts."

The Fourth Master, Mr. Paint, glanced at Linghu Chong up and down from the corner of his tipsy eyes. "You know painting? You know sword arts?" he suddenly asked. The two questions sounded very insolent and impolite.

Linghu Chong noticed that the wine cup in his hand was a jade green Emerald Cup; he could also tell from the smell that the wine inside the cup was Pear-Blossom Wine. Suddenly, Zu Qianqiu's speech on the boat when they traveled in the Yellow River came to his mind.

"Bai Juyi wrote in his poem *Spring View of Hangzhou*, 'The red sleeves of the silk weaving girls reflected the persimmon leaves, and the emerald green flag of the wine shop sets off the Pear-Blossom Wine.' To drink the Pear-Blossom Wine, Emerald Cup would be the natural choice. Fourth Master is truly an expert in the art of wine-drinking."

Linghu Chong did not have much education and knew little about poetry and literature. But being a very intelligent man, he was gifted with an extraordinarily retentive memory and could recite other people's words after hearing them over once. So easily, he copied Zu Qianqiu's exact words over.

Mr. Paint's eyes became wide open at these words. Suddenly he held Linghu Chong into his arms.

"Good heavens!" he cried out loud, "A bosom friend has arrived. Come! Follow me! Let's go drink at least three hundred cups. Brother Feng, I am addicted to the art of wine,

the art of painting, and the art of sword. People call me Lord of the Three Arts. But among the three arts, the art of wine is at the top of the list. Art of painting is the second and art of sword is the last."

These words sounded like music in Linghu Chong's ears. "I know nothing about the art of painting," he thought to himself, "I've come to seek help in healing my injuries. It's the last thing I want to do to get into a sword fight with them. But drinking, that's just down my alley. What more could I have asked for?"

Without hesitation, he followed Mr. Paint inside followed by Xiang Wentian and Shi Lingwei. Down a winding corridor, they came to a room to the west, and as soon as the portiere was lifted, a strong fragrance of wine assailed their nostrils.

Linghu Chong had been fond of drinking since childhood. Only because his Master and Master-Wife hadn't given him much pocket money, he had not the luxury to distinguish the good from the bad and simply drank whatever he could get. Not until he listened to Elder Bamboo-Green discussing the art of drinking in detail in the city of Luoyang, and was shown the many kinds of great wines, was he able to appreciate quality wines and the art of drinking. Firstly, this was congenial for him; secondly, he had a good teacher to give him directions. So as soon the scent of wine hit his nostrils, he praised.

"Wow! I smell the scent of aged High Grade Fen-Wine. Hmm, the Hundred-Grass Wine probably is around seventy-five years old. And that Monkey Wine is even harder to come by."

As soon as he recognized the aroma of the Monkey Wine, he instantly remembered Lu Dayou, his sixth apprentice brother, and sorrow swelled in his heart.

"Excellent! Excellent! Brother Feng, as soon as you stepped into my wine room, you have already recognized the best three brews in my collection. You are really an expert!



Amazing! Amazing indeed!" Mr. Paint clapped his hands with a big smile blossoming on his face.

Linghu Chong glanced around the room. What met his eyes were wine jars, wine bottles, wine calabashes, and wine cups everywhere.

"I really doubt Senior Master's collection stops at the three great brews I've just mentioned. The Shaoxing-Red Wine is definitely first-class, and the Grape-Wine from the Western Region city Turfan,<sup>67</sup> which requires four cycles of distillation and ferments, is second to none in the entire world."

"My Turfan four cycles of distillation and ferments Grape-Wine is still sealed off in the wooden barrel. How could you have sniffed it out?" Mr. Paint uttered, half shocked and half pleased.

"Come on! With such quality wine, even if you hide it in a cellar twenty feet below ground, the sweet scent would still make it all the way here," Linghu Chong said with a grin.

"Right on! Let's drink this four cycles distillation and ferments Grape-Wine, then!" Mr. Paint shouted.

Soon, he took out a big barrel from a corner of the room. The barrel had begun to turn black from its old age and was covered with wriggling Western Region scripts. The wooden stopper was sealed off by sealing wax, which carried the sign of a solemn looking stamp. Mr. Paint held the wooden stopper and gave it a gentle pull. All of a sudden, the room was filled with the scent of great wine. Shi Lingwei was a man who never touched alcohol, and at the strong smell from the wine, he immediately felt tipsy. Mr. Paint waved him off with a grin.

"Go out! Go out! You don't want to get drunk, do you?"

Placing three wine cups in a row, he picked the barrel up and poured the wine toward the wine cups. The wine's color was dark red and almost looked like blood. When the cups were full, the top of the liquid was actually slightly higher than the edge of the cup, yet not a drop spilled out.

"This man has extraordinary Kung Fu skills," Linghu Chong couldn't help but cheer inwardly. "Holding the over one-hundred pounds big barrel in his arms and pouring wine into the small wine cups, he was still able to fill the cups perfectly to their capacities. That is no easy task."

"Cheers! Cheers!" Holding the wooden barrel under his right arm, he raised his wine cup with his left hand and stared at Linghu Chong's face with unblinking eyes, waiting to see his reaction after he tasted the wine.

Linghu Chong raised his own cup and then drank half of its content down his throat, smacking his lips as he tasted the flavor, his eyes closed. But because of the thick layer of powder on his face, the only express on his face was indifference, as though he didn't quite like the taste. Mr. Paint's face, on the other hand, had anxiety written all over it, as if he was afraid that this expert in wine-appreciation would only rate his wine mediocre.

After a long while, Linghu Chong finally opened his eyes. "Very strange! Very strange indeed!" he muttered.

"What's strange about it?" Mr. Paint asked.

"Well, this is so confusing. This is really beyond me," Linghu Chong answered.

"You are saying....," Mr. Paint said, his eyes flickering with joy.

"I've only had the fortune to taste this wine once before, and that was in the city of Luoyang. Even though the wine was utterly mellow and pure, one could still feel the slight sourness in its flavor. According to a grandmaster in the art of wine, that was because of the bumping and jolting along the transportation route. With the four cycles distillation and ferments Turfan Grape-Wine, the more you move it, the more of the excellence will be impaired. There are many thousands of miles between Turfan and Hangzhou, but Senior Master's wine doesn't even have the slightest sourness in its flavor. Well...."

Mr. Paint broke into loud laughter, looking very pleased of himself.

"This is my utmost secret. I had to use three sword moves in exchange for the secret recipe from Moore Watson, the Western Region Swordsman. Do you want to hear it?"

"I am already perfectly satisfied for the chance to enjoy such wonderful wine. I certainly dare not to ask about Senior Master's secret recipe." Linghu Chong shook his head.

"Let's drink! Let's drink!" Mr. Paint filled the three wine cups once again. Linghu Chong's no desire for the secret recipe actually made his heart itch more. He couldn't help but mutter, "Actually the recipe is not worth a dime. It's amazingly simply, you know."

Linghu Chong knew that the less he desired to hear the secret, the more Mr. Paint would want to share it. So he shook his hands hurriedly.

"Senior Master, please, please don't speak the secret out. I can imagine that the three sword moves you gave out must have been no small matter. If I take away your secret recipe, which you had to pay a great price in exchange, so easily, I'll never feel right about it. It is well said that there's no receiving a reward without making a merit...."

"Didn't you drink with me? Didn't you recognize the origin of the wine? That's plenty of merit already. You must listen to the secret recipe," Mr. Paint insisted.

"I feel great gratitude that Senior Master is willing to grant me an audience and bestow on me your most valuable wine collection. How could I...?"

"But I want to tell you. You can listen."

"This is Fourth Master's goodwill. Brother Feng, you need not decline," Xiang Wentian also chimed in.

"Exactly! Exactly!" Mr. Paint concurred. "Let me ask you. Can you tell how old the wine is?" he asked with all smiles.

Linghu Chong drank up his wine and tasted it carefully. After a long while he spoke again.

“There is another thing strange about this wine. It tastes like it’s one hundred and twenty years old, yet it also tastes as though it is only twelve or thirteen years old. There’s old flavor in the recent taste and there’s also new flavor in the old taste. Comparing to normal, over one hundred years old wine, it seems to have a unique essence.”

Xiang Wentian knitted his brows slightly as he thought to himself, “Now he has really made a fool of himself. There’s over one hundred years difference between one hundred and twenty years and twelve or thirteen years. How could they be mentioned in the same breath?”

He was afraid that Mr. Paint would be displeased to hear these words, but quite to the contrary, the old fellow Mr. Paint broke into loud laughter, his long beard fluttering back and forth.

“Good brother! You are as sharp as a razor. That’s exactly where the secret lies. Let me tell you. That Western Region Swordsman, Moore Watson, gave me ten barrels of one hundred and twenty years old Turfan Grape Wine that had gone through three cycles of distillation and ferments and had five fine horses carry them all the way to Hangzhou. And then I went through the fourth cycle of distillation and ferments and brewed one barrel of fine wine using the ten barrels Grape Wine. If we count the days, that was exactly twelve and a half years ago. That’s why the Grape Wine didn’t go sour after such a long journey and why there’s old flavor in the recent taste and new flavor in the old taste.”

“That’s why!” Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong both put their hands together.

“Even if you were to use ten sword moves in exchange for the secret of making such wonderful wine, it would have been worth it. And you only had to use three moves. What a steal!” Linghu Chong added.

Mr. Paint was even more pleased. “Little brother, you really understand me well. At that time, both Big Brother and Third Brother grumbled about it and complained that by

exchanging sword moves for wine brewing technique, I had let the secret of our Central Region unique skills into the Western Region. And even though Second Brother only smiled without saying anything, I bet he didn't approve it in his mind, either. Only you, little brother, understand that I've made a kill in this deal. Lets have a toast for that!"

Seeing that Xiang Wentian obviously didn't know anything about the art of drinking, he paid no more attention to him.

"Fourth Master, there's actually another way to enjoy this wine. Too bad we won't be able to at this moment," Linghu Chong said after drinking up another cup of wine.

"How? Why can't we?" Mr. Paint asked anxiously.

"Turfan is the hottest place in the world. I heard that when Great Master Xuan-Zang<sup>68</sup> journeyed to India to retrieve the true Buddhist Scriptures, he went by the Mountain of Blaze, which is exactly where Turfan is located," Linghu Chong explained.

"Yes. That place is very hot, indeed. In the summertime, even after you immerse yourself in a bucket of cold water, you'd still feel the unbearable heat. And in the wintertime, it'll freeze you to the bone. But just because of that, the grapes they produce there are out of the ordinary," Mr. Paint remarked.

"When I tasted this wine in the city of Luoyang, it was still very cold. That grandmaster in the art of drinking brought out a big piece of ice and then set the wine cups on top of the ice. Once the wine was iced, it had a different kind of taste. It is already in the early summer now, that's why I said we wouldn't be able to taste it that way," Linghu Chong said.

"When I was in the Western Region, unfortunately it was in the summertime also. Moore Watson also mentioned about the wonderful taste of Iced Grape Wine. Little brother, that's easy. All you have to do is to stay in our Plum Manor for another half a year. Then when it is in the winter, we can

taste the wine together,” Mr. Paint suggested. After a short pause, he went on, his eyebrows slightly knitted, “But we’ll have to wait for such a long time. What a torment!”

“It’s a pity that there’s no one here in Jiangnan who specializes in ‘Icy Palm’ or ‘Cold-Wind Claw’ the kind of Kung Fu that focuses on the negative principles, or else...,” Xiang Wentian joined in.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it!” before Xiang Wentian even finished his sentence, Mr. Paint had shouted out cheerfully. Setting the wine barrel down to the floor, he walked out of the room excitedly.

Linghu Chong cast a glance at Xiang Wentian with a stomach full of questions, but Xiang Wentian only grinned back in silence.

Not long after, Mr. Paint had returned, dragging a very tall and very thin, old man in black robe behind him.

“Second Brother, you’ve got to do me a favor this time no matter what,” he pleaded.

Linghu Chong looked at the man. What he saw was a man with delicate features, only that his face looked unnaturally white as though the face of a corpse, which would send a chill down one’s spine at the sight of it. After Mr. Paint introduced him, Linghu Chong learned that the old man was the Second Master of the Plum Manor, Mr. Black-White. His hair looked extremely black while his skin looked extremely white. They were certainly in sharp contrast.

“What favor?” Mr. Black-White asked in a cold tone.

“To demonstrate your Turning-Water-Into-Ice Kung Fu to these two good friends of mine,” Mr. Paint said.

“That’s just an insignificant skill not even worth mentioning. It would only make the true experts laugh,” Mr. Black-White said coldly, rolling his black eyeballs around the white of the eye as he spoke.

“Second Brother, to tell you the truth, this Brother Feng, here, said that if we ice the Turfan Grape Wine, it would have

an interesting taste. But where the heck can I find ice in the middle of the summer?" Mr. Paint confessed.

"The wine is already very mellow and savory. There's no need to ice it," Mr. Black-White replied.

"Turfan is a place of sweltering heat...", Linghu Chong explained.

"Totally! Very hot!" Mr. Paint added.

"Although the grapes produced there are excellent, inevitably, they also carried some of the summer heat," Linghu Chong went on.

"Totally! That's of course!" Mr. Paint added again.

"The summer heat was then brewed into the wine. Though after one hundred years, the effect had reduced dramatically, the little bit of bitter is simply inevitable, after all," Linghu Chong concluded.

"Totally! Totally! If you had not mentioned it, I would have thought that it was because the flame was too high at the time of the distillation. I've really blamed that royal cook wrongly," Mr. Paint said.

"What royal cook?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Well, I was afraid to spoil the ten barrels of great wine with incorrect degree of heating at the time of the distillation, so I made a special trip to the imperial palace in Beijing and grabbed the royal cook to come back with me so he could make the fire and brew the wine for me." Mr. Paint grinned.

"Making a mountain out of a molehill?" Mr. Black-White shook his head.

"I see," Xiang Wentian cut in the conversation. "If it were for just ordinary ones, it wouldn't matter much for them to have the bitterness in their drink. But Second Master and Fourth Master are lofty hermits that retreated to the lakeside of the scenic West Lake, completely different from the rough fellows in the Martial World. Once the wine is iced and rid of the roughness, then it would match perfectly with the status of the two lofty masters. It is just like the gamesmanship in

the game of Go.<sup>69</sup> Combating with sheer strength would only fall into the ninth grade of gamesmanship while masters in the first or second grade of gamesmanship would seek a contest of spirit and understanding....”

“You know the game of Go?” rolling his queer eyes once again, Mr. Black-White suddenly grabbed at Xiang Wentian’s shoulder and asked eagerly.

“The game of Go is the favorite in my life. Unfortunately my skills are just ordinary. So I traveled all over the country in pursuit of Go manuals. Throughout the past thirty years, I’ve managed to memorize quite a few of the famous games of all ages,” Xiang Wentian replied.

“Which famous games have you memorized?” Mr. Black-White asked excitedly.

“For example: The game Wang Zhi watched when he encountered celestial beings on Mount Decayed Helve,<sup>70</sup> the game Liu Zhongpu played against the Fairy Granny on Mount Li,<sup>71</sup> and the game Wang Jixin heard between the mother and the daughter-in-law fairy foxes<sup>72</sup>....”

Before he even finished, Mr. Black-White had begun shaking his head in disappointment. “Those are only myths. How can they be credible? And how could there be real game manuals from those myth stories?” At that word, he let go of Xiang Wentian’s shoulder.

“Well, at first, I also thought these were just stories made up by busybodies, but twenty-five years ago when I saw the game manual for the game between Liu Zhongpu and the Fairy Granny of Mount Li with my own eyes and realized how pointed and profound each move was, nothing an ordinary person could have made up, that was when I believed whole heartedly that the myth story was real. Is Senior Master also fond of this game?”

Mr. Paint suddenly burst into an uncontrolled laugh, his long beard fluttered about once again.

“Why are you laughing?” Xiang Wentian asked.



“Didn’t you ask my Second Brother if he is fond of the game of Go? Ha-ha-ha! My Second Brother’s name is Mr. Black-White. You tell me if he likes the game or not. The way Second Brother loves the game of Go is just like how I love the art of drinking,” Mr. Paint said in amusement.

“Good heavens! Second Master, please excuse my random talk. That’s like displaying one’s slight skill before an expert,” Xiang Wentian said hurriedly.

“Did you really see the game manual for the game between Liu Zhongpu and the Fairy Granny of Mount Li?” Mr. Black-White asked. “I’ve seen recordings from ancient journals about this story. It said that Liu Zhongpu was the national champion at the time, but he lost miserably to a countryside granny at the foot of Mount Li and spat out several liters of blood from the frustration. That’s why this famous game manual was named the ‘Blood-Spitting Manual.’ Could this ‘Blood-Spitting Manual’ really exist in this world?”

When he first entered the room, his face had looked completely indifferent, but now it was covered with excitement.

“Twenty-Five years ago, I had the chance of reading it in the old residence of a well-known family in Chengdu, Szechwan. Because it was such a stunning battle, even after twenty-five years, I could still remember every single one of the entire one hundred and twelve moves,” Xiang Wentian elaborated.

“There are a total of one hundred and twelve moves? Why don’t you show it to me? Come on, let’s go to my game room to set it up,” Mr. Black-White proposed anxiously.

Mr. Paint stretched his arms out and blocked the way.

“Hold it! Second Brother, if you don’t make ice for me, see if I’ll ever let you leave,” he said as he took out a white china basin filled with clear water.

“Alas, each of the four brothers has his own ‘thing’ to be crazy about. It’s hopeless,” Mr. Black-White sighed.

He stretched out his right hand and inserted his index finger into the water. Only a short moment later, faint traces of white mist began rising from the water surface, and soon, hoar frost began forming along the edges of the basin. Before long, a thin layer of ice appeared at the water surface. The ice grew thicker and thicker and only minutes later, the water inside the basin had all turned into cold ice. Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong both cheered loudly.

"I heard that the 'Violent Wind Finger' Kung Fu had been long lost in the Martial World. Who would have thought that the Second Master...?" Xiang Wentian said.

"This is not the 'Violent Wind Finger.' This is called the 'Profound Heavenly Finger,' which is a much more advanced Kung Fu in comparison with the truculent 'Violent Wind Finger' Kung Fu," Mr. Paint clarified promptly. Without any delay, he had placed four wine cups on top of the ice as he spoke and filled them with Grape Wine. Shortly afterwards, traces of white mist began rising from the surface of the wine.

"Now!" Linghu Chong said.

Picking up a wine cup, Mr. Paint tossed the wine down, and sure enough, the wine tasted thick and mellow and there was not a trace of bitterness. In addition, a taste of cool and refreshing was also added to the wine and made it even more delicious. He couldn't help but praise.

"How marvelous! Now I did a great job brewing the wine; Brother Feng did a great job explained it; Second brother did a great job made the ice. Well, what about you? Hmm...." He grinned at Xiang Wentian. "You did a great job stooging alongside."

Mr. Black-White drank up his wine casually, didn't even pay any attention to the flavor of it. Grabbing Xiang Wentian's arm, he pulled.

"Come on! Come on! Show me how Liu Zhongpu's 'Blood-Spitting Manual' looks like."

Xiang Wentian gave Linghu Chong's sleeve a gentle pull, and Linghu Chong immediately understood. "I'd like to go take a look, myself," he said.

"I bet you there's nothing interesting about it. Why don't you and I stay here and enjoy our wine?" Mr. Paint suggested.

"We can watch the game and enjoy our wine at the same time," Linghu Chong replied and began walking following behind Mr. Black-White and Xiang Wentian.

Mr. Paint had no choice but follow them into the game room, holding the big wine barrel under the arm.

The game room was a very spacious room, but other than a stone table and two soft chairs in the middle of the room it was completely empty. The top of the stone table had been carved into a game board with a grid of nineteen vertical and nineteen horizontal lines. On the two ends of the checkerboard sat two baskets, one filled with black game pieces and one with white ones. Apparently having no other articles in the room except the table, the chairs and the game pieces was to minimize distractions for the players.

Xiang Wentian walked to the stone table and then placed one game piece on each of the "star" points on the four corners of the game board. Next, he set a white game piece on the six-three intersection, then a black game piece on the nine-three intersection, a white game piece on the six-five intersection, a black game piece on the nine-five intersection. He went on and on and placed one game piece after another onto the game board, gradually slowing down as he went.

The black side and the white side began a fierce dogfight from the very beginning of the game, and neither side had even one poor move. Mr. Black-White looked at the game board with fixed stares and soon sweat streamed down his forehead.

Linghu Chong found himself baffled by the scene. He had witnessed how Mr. Black-White turned water into ice with his "Profound Heavenly Finger" Kung Fu, which would have

required extraordinary inner energy cultivation, but he didn't even break a sweat; playing Go game was only an unorthodox school,<sup>73</sup> yet he was sweating profusely just watching a game. When one had great concern about something, he would more likely to lose his rational. This man was crazy about the game of Go, and Xiang Wentian most probably had picked this weakness of his intentionally as a breakthrough.

Sure enough, when Mr. Black-White noticed that Xiang Wentian hadn't put any game piece down a long while after he showed the sixty-sixth move, he turned impatient.

"What about the next move?" he asked.

"That is a key step of the game. Where do you think the next game piece should be at?" Xiang Wentian grinned.

Mr. Black-White pondered upon the question for quite a while and finally muttered, "Well, where do I want to put this one? A Tsume move would be inappropriate; a Dame move would not be right; a Sagari move wouldn't make it through; to make two eyes seems impossible.<sup>74</sup> Well...well...well...."

Holding a white game piece with his index finger and middle finger, he rapped on the stone table with it, but after almost half an hour, he was still unable to decide where on the game board to put this game piece. By then Mr. Paint and Linghu Chong had each drank up seventeen or eighteen cups of wine, already.

"Brother Tong, isn't this the 'Blood-Spitting Manual?' Do you really want my Second Brother to spit up blood because of it? Whatever the next step is, why don't you just tell us what it is straightforward?" noticing that Mr. Black-White's face began turning livid, Mr. Paint proposed.

"Alright! The sixty-seventh move should be right here," Xiang Wentian replied as he placed a game piece at the seven-four intersection.

"Splendid!" Mr. Black-White called out as he smacked his thigh with excitement. "To place the game piece there is a brilliant move, indeed."

“Liu Zhongpu’s this move is, of course, a brilliant move. But it’s only a clever move from a mortal champion. When compared to the divine move from the Mount Li Fairy Granny, it is far inferior,” Xiang Wentian said with a smile.

“What about the divine move from the Mount Li Fairy Granny?” Mr. Black-White inquired eagerly.

“Second Master might as well give it a try,” Xiang Wentian said.

Mr. Black-White pondered upon it deeply but could only conclude that this was destined to be a losing battle, and it would have been impossible to turn the tide. So he shook his head.

“Since it’s a divine move, how can any one of us mortals figure it out? Brother Tong, there’s no need to sell the climax.”

“This move contained wonderful foresight. It really takes an immortal to figure it out,” Xiang Wentian grinned again.

Mr. Black-White was an expert in gamesmanship, thus also became very proficient in reading an opponent’s minds. Since Xiang Wentian wouldn’t just speak out the game manual frankly, which made his heart itchier by the second, he reckoned that Xiang must had something he wanted in return.

“Brother Tong, if you tell me this game manual, I assure you that you won’t be disappointed.”

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Is it possible that Brother Xiang knew this Second Master’s ‘Profound Heavenly Finger’ Kung Fu can cure my injuries, that’s why he went around in such a big circle for the request?”

“Brother Feng and I have nothing to request of the four Manor Masters. Second Master’s words have really put us two down,” Xiang Wentian raised his head and said.

“I beg your pardon for my discreet remark.” Mr. Black-White bowed deeply. Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong also bowed in return.

"The two of us came to the Plum Manor because we'd like to make a wager with the four Manor Masters," Xiang Wentian said.

"Make a wager? What kind of wager?" Mr. Black-White and Mr. Paint asked in unison.

"I want to make a wager that no one in the Plum Manor can beat Brother Feng here in sword arts," Xiang Wentian answered.

At those words, Mr. Black and Mr. Paint both turned to look at Linghu Chong. Mr. Black-White's face looked apathetic and with no sign of approval or disapproval. Mr. Paint, on the other hand, broke into a loud laugh.

"What's the stake then?" Mr. Paint asked.

"If we lose, I'll give this painting to Fourth Master," Xiang Wentian replied as he untied the package on his back and opened it, inside which were two scrolls.

Xiang Wentian opened one of the scrolls and a very antiquated painting appeared in front of everyone's eyes. At the upper right corner of the painting the autograph read, "Traveler in Mount Brook, Painted by Fan Zhongli of the Northern Song."<sup>75</sup> In the painting, a towering mountain shot up to the sky, steep and magnificent, well illustrated with the thick ink style. Even though Linghu Chong had little knowledge about painting, he could still tell that this scenery painting was an excellent piece of art. The awe-inspiring mountain stood tall and upright. Although it was only a picture on the canvas, one still couldn't help but feel the admiration soaring in his heart.

"Holy cow!" Mr. Paint cried out. Fixing his eyes upon the painting, he could no longer look away. After a good while he finally spoke again, "This is the authentic work of Fan Kuan in the Northern Song era. Where...where did you get it?"

Xiang Wentian smiled but did not answer. Slowly, he began rolling the painting into a scroll.

"Wait," Mr. Paint called out.

He reached out and pulled Xiang Wentian's arm, trying to stop Xiang from rolling the painting. But as soon as his hand touched Xiang's arm, a stream of soft yet vigorous inner energy shot out of Xiang's arm and gently pushed his palm away. Xiang Wentian looked as though he had no idea about what had just happened and slowly rolled the painting back into a scroll. Mr. Paint was amazed. When he had pulled Xiang Wentian's arm just now, he had not really put much strength into the pull, afraid that he might damage the painting. But the inner energy push from Xiang's arm clearly showed very advanced inner energy cultivation. Moreover, apparently Xiang had not used his inner energy to the full extent. He felt his admiration growing inwardly.

"Old Tong, turned out your Kung Fu is so excellent! It's probably on par with mine," he praised.

"Fourth Master must be joking! Aside from the skills in sword arts, the four masters of the Plum Manor are invincible in any other kind of Kung Fu. I, Tong Huajin, am just a nobody. How could I ever be compared to the Fourth Master?" Xiang Wentian replied.

"Why did you say 'aside from the skills in sword arts'? Are you so sure that my swordsmanship is not up to his?" Mr. Paint pulled a long face.

"Two Masters, what do you think of this work of calligraphy?" Xiang Wentian let out a slight smile and then unrolled the other scroll, which turned out to be a piece of Crazy Grass<sup>76</sup> style calligraphy with extremely cursive scripts.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Mr. Paint cried out in surprise. After the three "oh" he suddenly shouted out at the top of his lungs, "Third Brother! Third Brother! The treasure of your life is here!"

The shout was so loud and explosive that even the walls, the windows and the door jolted while dusts on top of the rafters and beams on the ceiling began falling. Additionally,

the shout was so sudden that Linghu Chong was completely astounded.

"What's the fuss?" a man asked from a distance.

"If you don't hurry up to take a look, once they put it away, you are gonna regret it for the rest of your life!" Mr. Paint shouted.

"You've found another counterfeit calligraphy work, haven't you?" the man outside replied.

The portiere was raised and a man stepped into the room. This was a short and stout man, the top of his head completely bald without a single hair, which shined profusely under the light as though it had been polished. There was a big brush in his right hand and there were ink marks all over his robe. He walked closer to take a look at the calligraphy work, and suddenly, his eyes became wide open and he began breathing heavily.

"This...this is authentic! It really...really...is the 'Willful Book' by Zhang Xu of the Tang Dynasty. It can't...can't...can't be fake!" he muttered, his voice trembling.

The strokes of the Grass Style writing on the paper appeared unrestrained and extensive, as though a Kung Fu master was performing the martial arts of Qing-Gong, leaping up sometimes and bending low some other times, swift in the movement, yet exquisite in the poise.

Out of each ten characters, Linghu Chong could only recognize one at his best. But the many stamps of seals and postscripts at the bottom of the calligraphy book easily convinced him that this calligraphy artwork was no trivial matter.

"This is my third brother Mr. Bald-Brush," Mr. Paint introduced. "He picked this name because calligraphy is his ultimate passion and thousands of writing brushes had turned bald in his hands from practicing. It is not because he is baldheaded. Please don't confuse one with the other."

"Got it!" Linghu Chong acknowledged with a smile.



Reaching out with his right index finger, the man named Mr. Bald-Brush stared at the "Willful Book" and began writing in the air following the ticks and strokes in the calligraphy work, his mind completely imbedded in his own world. Not only didn't he cast a single glance toward Xiang Wentian or Linghu Chong, apparently he didn't even hear a word from Mr. Paint's introduction.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong felt a shock in his heart. "Brother Xiang must have planned this way beforehand. When I first met him in the roadside pavilion, he was already carrying this package behind his back," he thought to himself. But then he had a second thought. "At that time, the package did not necessarily contain those two scrolls. Maybe, along our journey, in order to get the four Plum Manor Masters to treat my injury, he went outside and bought them, or even stole or snatched them, when I was resting in the inn. Hmm, he most likely stole them. Where can he find such invaluable artwork for sale anywhere?"

He could hear the slight sound made by strong energy force tearing through air when that Mr. Bald-Brush wrote in the air with his finger. The powerful internal strength shown was in par with that of Mr. Black-White. "My internal injury was caused by the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Great Master No Commandment," he thought. "It seems that the internal strength cultivation of the three Plum Manor Masters is no less than that of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Great Master No Commandment. The First Manor Master of the Plum Manor might be even more powerful. Together with Brother Xiang, all five of them working together, they perhaps can heal my injury. I certainly hope it would not cost them great inner energy exhaustion."

Xiang Wentian did not wait for Mr. Bald-Brush to finish. He quickly rolled the "Willful Book" back into a scroll and put it back into the package.

Mr. Bald-Brush stared at Xiang Wentian in great disbelief. After a long while, he finally said, "What do you want in

exchange?"

"I don't want to exchange it for anything." Xiang Wentian shook his head.

"How about the twenty-eight moves of Stone-Drum [77](#) Acupoint-Hitting Brush Kung Fu?" Mr. Bald-Brush proposed.

"No!" Mr. Black-White and Mr. Paint shouted in chorus.

"Yes! Why not? If I could use it in exchange for this genuine Crazy Grass work of Zhang Xu, why should I feel pity for losing my Stone-Drum Acupoint-Hitting Brush Kung Fu?" Mr. Bald-Brush disagreed.

"No!" Xiang Wentian shook his head once again.

"Then why did you show it to me?" Mr. Bald-Brush asked anxiously.

"Well, my mistake then. Third Master, just pretend you have never seen it before," Xiang Wentian answered.

"But I have. How can I just pretend I have never seen it?" Mr. Bald-Brush objected.

"If Third Master really wants to acquire this genuine work of Zhang Xu, it's not difficult at all. All you have to do is to accept our wager," Xiang Wentian said.

"What's the wager?" Mr. Bald-Brush asked hurriedly.

"Third Brother," Mr. Paint cut in, "this mister here is a little bit out of his mind. He wants to make a wager that no one in our Plum Manor could beat the sword arts of this friend Feng from the Huashan School."

"What if someone could beat his sword arts? What then?" Mr. Bald-Brush asked.

"If someone in the Plum Manor, regardless of whom, can beat my Brother Feng's long sword, then I'll give this genuine 'Willful Book' of Zhang Xu away to the Third Master for free, and leave that authentic painting by Fan Kuan, 'Traveler in Mount Brook', to Fourth Master as a gift. I'll also write down the twenty famous Go games played by fairies, ghosts, and immortals that I've memorized and give them to the Second Master," Xiang Wentian explained.

“How about our Big Brother? What are you giving to him?” Mr. Bald-Brush asked.

“I have this music score of the ‘Guang-Ling Song’. Maybe the First Master....”

“Guang-Ling Song?” the three Masters of the Plum Manor cried out all together before Xiang Wentian even finished his sentence.

Linghu Chong also felt a shock. “Wasn’t it Elder Qu who found the ‘Guang-Ling Song’ music score after digging through numerous ancient tombs and composed it into the ‘Smiling Proud Wanderer’ song? Where did Brother Xiang get it?” he couldn’t help but ponder. Then he realized, “Brother Xiang was the Right Counselor of the Demon’s Cult, and Elder Qu was an Elder of the Demon’s Cult. They were probably on friendly terms with each other. And when Elder Qu got hold of this music score, in the great joy, he of course would tell Brother Xiang about it. If Brother Xiang had wanted to borrow it and make a copy, Elder Qu, for sure, wouldn’t have any problem with it.” At the thought that the music score was still present while the founder had perished, he couldn’t help but sigh inwardly.

“Ever since Ji Kang died, the ‘Guang-Ling Song’ had been lost forever. Brother Tong, aren’t these words of yours a bit deceitful?” Mr. Bald-Brush shook his head in disbelief.

“I have an intimate friend, who is obsessed with zither music. He said that everybody believes that after Ji Kang died, there is no more ‘Guang-Ling Song’ under the sun. Undoubtedly, this music score had fallen into oblivion after the Western Jin Dynasty, but what about before the Western Jin Dynasty?” Xiang Wentian grinned.

Mr. Bald-Brush and the other two Manor Masters glanced at each other blankly; none could understand what Xiang Wentian’s words meant.

“This friend of mine possesses extraordinary mentalities. Furthermore, he is not the kind who shies from committing all kinds of outrages. So he began excavating in famous Pre-Jin

Dynasty zither players' tombs. A willful man will have his way. After digging through dozens of ancient tombs, he finally found the music score manuscripts in the tomb of Cai Yi, the famous musician of the Eastern Han Dynasty."

Both Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint let out a slight cry of surprise. Mr. Black-White nodded slowly and exclaimed, "Intelligent and courageous! Extraordinary!"

Xiang Wentian opened his package and then took out a booklet with the words "Guang-Ling Song Music Score" written on the cover. He turned a few pages through it casually. Sure enough, it had music notes recorded in it.

"Brother Feng," Xiang Wentian said after he handed the booklet to Linghu Chong, "if anyone in the Plum Manor beats your sword arts, please give this music score to the First Master of the Plum Manor."

Linghu Chong took the booklet and placed it into his chest pocket. "This could have been Elder Qu's relic. Since Elder Qu has passed away, what's so difficult if Brother Xiang wanted to pick out the music score, himself?" he thought to himself.

"Brother Feng, here, is well accomplished in the art of wine; his sword skills must be just as excellent. But he is only a young man; it's hardly possible that within our Plum Manor...ha-ha, isn't that a bit ridiculous?" Mr. Paint grinned.

"If it is true that no one within our Plum Manor can overcome young hero Feng, what do we lose?" Mr. Black-White asked.

Although Linghu Chong had the agreement with Xiang Wentian beforehand that he would let Xiang arrange everything, he didn't expect things to turn out this way and felt that Xiang Wentian had gone a bit too far. Weren't they here to ask for a healing treatment? How could they be so arrogant and belittling the hosts so much? Besides, he had lost all his inner strength. How could he be a match for these very capable Masters of the Plum Manor? At that thought, he opened his mouth.

“Brother Tong always likes to make jokes. How dare I, an insignificant junior who lags greatly behind in the understanding of martial arts, deliberate sword arts and exchange moves with the Masters of the Plum Manor?”

“These polite remarks are, of course, necessary; otherwise people would have called you a conceited swordsman,” Xiang Wentian said.

Mr. Bald-Brush didn't seem to have heard any of these words, instead, he muttered, “‘Three drinks turns Zhang Xu into Sage of Grass; baring his head before nobility he showed no class; wielding his writing brush he pours clouds onto papers in a blast.’ Second Brother, Zhang Xu was known as the Sage of Grass, the ultimate master in Grass Style calligraphy. This is how Du Fu wrote about him in the poem ‘Eight Drinking Saints Song’. He was also one of the ‘Eight Drinking Saints’. Just by looking at the ‘Willful Book’ you can probably imagine how he waved his writing brush about after drinking to his heart’s content. Well, it is so powerful and unstrained like a heavenly steed soaring across the skies. Just Brilliant! Just Brilliant!”

“Yep! If he likes to drink, then he must be an awesome guy, and of course the stuff he writes can’t be bad at all,” Mr. Paint agreed.

“Han Yu<sup>78</sup> also wrote about Zhang Xu in his poem: ‘Joy, anger, shame, or uneasiness; depression, sorrow, happiness, or leisure; hatred or aspiration. Inebriated and tipsy, when discontent is felt in the heart, he let it flow through his writing brush in Grass Style.’ This mister and we are just of the same kind. When discontent is felt in the heart, let it flow in writing the Grass Style, as if with a flick of the sword, happy we become!” Mr. Bald-Brush continued. Raising his finger once again, he began writing in the air. After a few strokes, he said to Xiang Wentian, “Hey, come on, let me take another look.”

Xiang Wentian shook his head. “Once Third Master wins the contest, this calligraphy book would have become yours.

There is no need to be impatient." He grinned.

Mr. Black-White was an expert in gamesmanship and always had careful consideration of the overall situation. Before thinking about winning, he was already considering the consequences of a defeat.

"If on one within the Plum Manor could defeat Brother Feng's sword arts, what kind of stakes would we be losing?" he inquired again.

"We have come to the Plum Manor with no intent for any favor or any item. All Brother Feng wants is to come to the ultimate summit of world martial arts and have the opportunity to exchange the understandings of sword arts with the best martial artists in this world. If, with any luck, we end up winning the contest, we'll turn around and leave right away without asking for any stake from you," Xiang Wentian answered.

"I see. This Hero Feng has come for fame. Defeating the 'Four Playfellows of Jiangnan' in succession will, indeed, gain him great fame in the Martial World," Mr. Black-White said.

"Second Master, you've thought it wrong," Xiang Wentian replied as he shook his head. "After today's sword contest in the Plum Manor, regardless of who the winner is, if even one word about it leaks out, Brother Feng and I will stand condemned by Heaven, and we are no better than dog's droppings."

"Good, good! I like your frankness," Mr. Paint remarked. "This room here is very spacious. Let me exchange a few moves with Brother Feng right here then. Brother Feng, where is your sword?"

"We are not bold enough to bring weapons to the Plum Manor," Xiang Wentian replied with a smile.

"Bring me two swords," Mr. Paint shouted out.

Someone answered from outside the room and soon Ding Jian and Shi Lingwei returned, each holding a sword with both hands. Walking in front of Mr. Paint, they bowed and

presented the swords. Picking up the sword from Ding Jian's hands, Mr. Paint said to Shi Lingwei, "Give that sword to him."

"Yes," Shi Lingwei acknowledged and then walked in front of Linghu Chong, holding the sword high with both hands.

Feeling very embarrassed about this entire matter, Linghu Chong turned his head and glanced at Xiang Wentian.

"The Fourth Master of the Plum Manor has reached the acme in the understanding of sword arts. Brother Feng, even if you could only learn one move or one technique from him, you would still benefit from it the rest of your life," Xiang Wentian affirmed.

Linghu Chong knew that under the current circumstance, this sword contest had become inevitable. Having no other alternatives, he took the sword with both hands, bowing slightly.

"Hold it, Fourth Brother," Mr. Black-White spoke up suddenly. "This Brother Tong here has put up a wager that no one in our Plum Manor can defeat Brother Feng. Ding Jian also knows how to use a sword, and he is also part of the Plum Manor. You don't necessarily have to do it yourself." The more confident Xiang Wentian sounded, the more worried he became. So he decided to let Ding Jian take the challenge first and test the water. He knew that Ding Jian possessed excellent skills in sword arts; besides, Ding was only a servant in the Plum Manor. Even if Ding lost the fight, there would have been no harm done to the great name of the Plum Manor. And with this test, they would be able to tell how good or bad this Feng Er-Zhong's skills in sword arts actually were.

"Sure, sure! As long as a person from the Plum Manor defeats my Brother Feng's sword arts, it counts as our defeat. It doesn't have to be the four Manor Masters themselves. Brother Ding here has earned the nickname 'Straight Line Lightning Sword' in the Martial World. His sword moves are so

fast. Such speed is rarely seen in the world. Brother Feng, it will be good for you if you check out Brother Ding's Straight Line Lightning Sword first." Xiang Wentian did not object.

Mr. Paint tossed his long sword toward Ding Jian. "If you lose, you'll be going to Turpan to transport wine for me as your punishment." He grinned.

Ding Jian caught the long sword with a blow and turned toward Linghu Chong. "Ding Jian here thanks Mister Feng for the chance of the sword match," he said. A short ring echoed as he drew his sword.

Linghu Chong also drew his sword and set the sheath on the stone table.

"Three Masters, Brother Ding, this is a contest of sword arts, so there's no need to compete in the inner strength department," Xiang Wentian spoke up again.

"Of course both sides will know when to stop," Mr. Black-White commented.

"Brother Feng," Xiang Wentian turned to Linghu Chong, "you have to promise to not use any inner strength in the match. We are having a contest of sword arts. The one with fine and intimate moves wins the match and the one with crude and sluggish moves loses it. The inner energy cultivation method of your Huashan School is very well-known in the Martial World. If you use your inner strength to achieve victory, then it counts as our defeat."

Linghu Chong almost laughed at these words. He thought to himself, "Brother Xiang knew very well that I don't have any bit of inner strength. He is using these words to trick them." So he said, "If I use my inner strength, for sure the three Masters, Brother Ding and Brother Shi will laugh their teeth off. I certainly dare not to use any bit of it."

"We've come to the Plum Manor with complete sincerity. If Brother Feng keep sticking to etiquette and being too modest, that would be disrespectful to the four senior masters. Everyone in the Martial world knows that the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' of your Huashan School is far superior



to the inner strength cultivation method of our Songshan School. Brother Feng, why don't you stand in these two footprints of mine when you spar with Brother Ding and make sure you don't move your feet?"

After these words, Xiang Wentian took a few steps aside, and two footprints, each almost two inches deep, appeared on two bricks on the floor. It turned out that while he was speaking he had shifted his inner strength to his feet and stamped two footprints on the bricks with shear force.

"Excellent Kung Fu!" Mr. Black-White, Mr. Bald-Brush, and Mr. Paint cheered in chorus.

Seeing how Xiang Wentian had shifted his inner strength to the bottom of his feet as he spoke without turning a hair, and there was not a single broken brick piece in the footprints he created, while the depth of the two footprints were exactly identical and the footprints were so smooth as though someone had carved it out carefully, they could tell that Xiang Wentian's inner strength had reached an incredible level, which was way above the inner strength level of their own. They all thought that Xiang Wentian was just showing off his inner strength. Although such an affected performance appeared shallow, not something a true martial arts master would have done, his amazing inner strength cultivation was still very admirable. None had a clue that Xiang Wentian actually had profound meaning in his action.

Linghu Chong had no problem understanding Xiang Wentian's behavior. Xiang had been propagating that his inner strength cultivation was superior to that of Xiang's. If Xiang's inner strength had been so extraordinary, then his could only have been more formidable, then when the match started, his opponents would not be bold enough to use inner strength against him, fearing of bringing disgrace to oneself. Besides, except for the skills in sword arts, he was no good in any other Kung Fu skills, and leaping and springing about were certainly not his good qualities. By standing in the two

footprints and only use sword arts in the spar, he could easily hide his inadequacy.

When Ding Jian heard Xiang Wentian suggesting Linghu Chong to have the sword fight with him while standing still in the two footprints, he couldn't help but feel greatly annoyed by the obvious contempt. But the profound inner strength Xiang Wentian showed by leaving footprints on bricks also astounded him. "If they are bold enough to challenge our four Masters, they could not have been ordinary. If I can get a draw out of the fight, I would have made a great contribution to the Plum Manor of the Lone Hill," he thought to himself.

He used to be an extremely arrogant swordsman in former years, but later he encountered a very formidable enemy. He was taken prisoner and was put through many torments. Fortunately the "Four Playfellows of Jiangnan" rescued him and set him free. That was when he decided to join the Plum Manor and willingly took on the job of a servant. After so many years, the fierceness and boldness inside him had almost died out entirely.

"Brother Ding, please!" Linghu Chong stepped into the footprints made by Xiang Wentian and said with a smile.

"Please excuse my lack of manners," Ding Jian apologized. He brandished his long sword transversely and suddenly, a long, white flash shot across everyone's eyes like a lightning, accompanied by the slight sound of the blade cutting through the air.

Although he had been living in seclusion in the Plum Manor for over ten years, his Kung Fu skills had not declined a bit. The sword art he used was named the "Straight Line Lightning Sword Art," and every time when a move in the sword art form was executed, it looked as though a lightning had just shot across the sky. The dazzling effect was so dramatic that it would have easily stunned the opponent and put fear in his heart. The formidable enemy that had once defeated him was a blind loner robber. Because the man was completely blind and used his hearing to detect Ding Jian's

sword moves, the awe-inspiring atmosphere created by the "Straight Line Lightning Sword" had no effect on him. At this moment when he put the sword art to good use, suddenly, the entire room had been filled with dazzling lightning flares.

But only after the first move of the "Straight Line Lightning Sword" was put to display, Linghu Chong had identified three major flaws in the sword art. Ding Jian didn't rush with his attack and simply waved his sword about as though he was showing a good amount of manners to a guest of the manor when in truth, he really intended to dazzle and slacken Linghu Chong so he would not be able to withstand the sharp attacking moves following behind.

By the time Ding Jian was on his fifth move, Linghu Chong had already counted a total of eighteen flaws in his sword moves. "Excuse me," he said as he thrust his long sword out at an oblique angle.

At the moment Ding Jian was in the middle of sweeping his sword from the left to the right in a rapid swing. Although the blade of Linghu Chong's sword was still two feet and six inches from his wrist, but the swing would have sent his own wrist toward the naked blade, and since the sweep was too rapid and carried too much strength, it was already impossible to take it back.

"Look out!" the five bystanders called out in unison as if by prior agreement.

Mr. Black-White happened to be holding two game pieces, one black and one white, in his palm. Just when he was about to shoot them at Linghu Chong's long sword to save Ding Jian's hand from being cutting off, a thought popped into his head, "If I help Ding Jian out by interfering with the contest, that would make the fight two against one, then clearly the Plum Manor would have lost the match and there would be no need for any further contest." Amid his hesitancy, Ding Jian's wrist had swept toward the sword blade speedily while Shi Lingwei uttered a loud cry of panic.

At the faction of the second, Linghu Chong turned his wrist gently, turning the blade of the sword sideways. With a light clap, Ding Jian's wrist hit the flat side of the sword, and to all the audiences' pleasant surprise, his wrist didn't suffer even the slightest damage. Only after a short daze did Ding Jian realize that his opponent had really shown great leniency. Within that fraction of a second, he had been fortunate enough to keep his hand. If his wrist had been cut, all his Kung Fu skills would have been ruined. Covered with cold sweat, he bowed down deeply.

"I am utterly grateful for the mercy Hero Feng has shown with his sword."

"I don't really deserve it!" Linghu Chong also bowed back.

Witnessing how Linghu Chong had turned his long sword to spare Ding Jian from bloodshed, Mr. Black-White, Mr. Bald-Brush, and Mr. Paint all felt their favor toward Linghu Chong growing rapidly. Mr. Paint poured a cup with wine and then raised it with both hands.

"Brother Feng, your sword skills are marvelous. Here's a toast for you!" he said.

"You flatter me!" Linghu Chong replied. Taking the wine cup from Mr. Paint, he drank it up.

Mr. Paint also drank a cup of wine in accompany. Filling the wine cup in Linghu Chong's hands again, he said, "Brother Feng, you are a man with great mercy and spared Ding Jian's hand. That calls for another toast."

"It was just a coincident. There's nothing to it," Linghu Chong answered and drank up his wine, holding the cup with both hands.

After drinking a cup in accompany, Mr. Paint filled the cup once again.

"Let's hold on to the third cup here, shall we? Let's have our play first, and whoever loses the match will have to drink the third cup as his penalty," he said.

"I'll be losing the match naturally. Why don't I drink it first?" Linghu Chong showed a big grin.

"No hurry! No hurry!" Mr. Paint shook his hand in disapproval. Setting the wine cup onto the stone table, he grabbed the long sword from Ding Jian's hands. "Brother Feng, you go first."

At the time of the first two cups of wine, Linghu Chong had already been deliberating inwardly, "He claims that he is addicted to, firstly, the art of wine, secondly, the art of painting, and thirdly, the art of sword, then his skills in the sword art had to be very exceptional. Judging from that celestial beings painting of his at the reception hall, the strokes are no doubt swift and fierce, however, it seems that he had some problem discipline himself. If his sword moves are comparable to his painting techniques, then they must have many flaws." Bowing down respectfully, he said, "Fourth Master, I beg for your clemency."

"Don't be too modest. Go ahead, show your moves," Mr. Paint said.

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered.

Raising his long sword, he thrust it at Mr. Paint's shoulder. The thrust was both skewed and tremulous. It obviously carried no strength, nor did it follow any methodical sword art principles. There simply could not have had a sword move like this amongst all possible sword arts in the entire world.

"What the heck is this?" Mr. Paint cried out, astounded.

Since he knew that Linghu Chong was a member of the Huashan Sword School, he had been pondering over the many sword art forms of the Huashan School in his mind. Who would have thought that when the first move was shown, it was nothing like it? Not only wasn't it a move from the Huashan Style Sword Arts, it couldn't even be called a sword move.

Ever since Linghu Chong studied the art of sword from Feng Qingyang, he not only learned the world-prominent "Dugu Nine Swords," but also grasped "overcoming a move

without a move” the ultimate gist in the art of sword. This gist and the theory behind the “Dugu Nine Swords” supplement each other. Though the profoundness and subtlety of the “Dugu Nine Swords” had reached the extreme as a sword art form, it contained moves and techniques after all, which were still traceable. But once one applied the principle of “overcoming a move without a move” to it, it became even more volatile and unpredictable, leaving no mark for the opponent to fathom. Therefore, when Linghu Chong made the thrust, Mr. Paint was immediately stunned, not knowing what would be the right way to block it using his own sword. Very confused, he took two paces back to dodge it.

When Linghu Chong made Ding Jian throw down his sword and gave in with only one move, although Mr. Black-White and Mr. Bald-Brush both praised Linghu Chong’s sword skills inwardly, neither of them found the result surprising, thinking that if he was bold enough to challenge the Plum Manor, it would have been ridiculous if he couldn’t even defeat a servant of the Plum Manor. After seeing how Mr. Paint was forced to retreat two steps by his first thrust, they found themselves astounded.

After retreating two paces back, Mr. Paint charged two paces forward right away. Linghu Chong sent another thrust out with his long sword, this time aiming at the upper left side of Mr. Paint’s body. This thrust was, again, just a random thrust that did not follow any of the general sword art principles. Mr. Paint wanted to fend it off with a side swing of his sword, but before the two swords even collided, he immediately realized that the opponent’s sword tip had shifted into a slanting angle pointing toward the lower right costal region, which was wide open, and if the opponent took advantage of this weakness in defense, the situation would be beyond redemption. That meant the block would be very unwise. In desperation, he changed his move instantly. With

a quick push to the ground, he sprang backward over ten feet.

“Excellent sword skills!” he shouted out and charged forward once again without any delay. Putting his entire weight behind the sword, he drove the blade toward Linghu Chong in great speed. This was a thrust with overwhelming power.

Noticing an obvious flaw at Mr. Paint’s bending right arm, Linghu Chong swung the long sword in no time and chopped toward his right elbow. If Mr. Paint did not change his move midway, then his right elbow would be cut off before he could incur any damage to his opponent. But Mr. Paint was a true swordsman with great skills. In the great hurry, he quickly lowered his wrist and thrust his sword at the floor. Relying on the counterforce from the floor, he flipped backward and landed steadily in over twenty feet. At the time his back was only a few inches from the wall. If he had used a little bit more strength when he executed the back flip, his back would have collided with the wall, which would have undoubtedly put a big dent on his reputation as a Martial Arts Grandmaster. But even so, the escape was simply too awkward, and his face showed some slight purplish red from the rush.

Being an open-minded and generous person, Mr. Paint laughed out, instead. Raising his left thumb, he uttered, “Excellent sword skills!” Waving his long sword vigorously, he launched a move “White Aurora Shooting the Sun,” which was then changed to “Willow Wickers Fluttering in the Spring Breeze,” which in turn changed to the “Mounting Flood-Dragon and the Soaring Phoenix.” The three moves were completed without any letup. It looked as though he didn’t ever move his feet, but once the three moves were executed, the tip of his long sword had reached Linghu Chong’s face.

Linghu Chong tilted his sword and smacked down gently, the flat side of his sword pushing down against the middle ridge of Mr. Paint’s long sword. The gentle smack was

executed with such accuracy in its positioning and timing. At that exact moment when Mr. Paint thrust his sword forward, his strength and energy were all concentrating on the tip of the sword, and the middle ridge of the sword carried no strength at all. As a light clank echoed, the long sword in his hand sank helplessly. Linghu Chong snapped his wrist gently and sent his long sword forward, pointing directly at Mr. Paint's solar plexus.

"Ah!" Mr. Paint cried out and leapt to the left. Folding his left hand into a sword finger form, he charged forward, waving the long sword in his right hand fiercely. This time he resorted to forceful hacks and chops, bringing his sword swishing down through the air. "Watch out!" he shouted.

He didn't really want to injure Linghu Chong. But this strike named "Jade Dragon Hanging Upside Down" was extremely swift and fierce. If the opponent had overlooked it and he couldn't rein in his own force in time, he was afraid that the strike might actually wound the opponent.

"Got it!" Linghu Chong acknowledged as he poked his long sword upward. With a slight rustle, the edge of his sword sliced upward right next to the side of Mr. Paint's sword.

If Mr. Paint followed through with the sword strike, before his blade could reach Linghu Chong's head, his five fingers holding his long sword would have been sliced off first. As he watched his opponent's long sword sliding upward against his own blade, a move that could not be countered, having no other alternative, he struck down heavily with his left palm. The energy shot out from his palm hit the floor with a loud boom, and utilizing the counterforce, he leapt backward and landed over ten feet away.

Before he even recomposed to a firm stance, he had drew three circles in front of him with his long sword, which magically changed into three circles of light. The three circles of light looked as though they'd actually materialized. After freezing in the air for a moment, they began moving toward Linghu Chong gradually. At the first look, these sword energy



turned circles of light did not appear as swift or fierce as the "Straight Line Lightning Sword," but the energy released easily filled the entire room and everyone felt the chilling force coming from them.

Linghu Chong extended his long sword and then sliced out from the left side of the light circle with an inclined angle, which was exactly an energy gap when the power from Mr. Paint's first move was just about to die and the power from the second move was just about to be released.

"Oh?" Mr. Paint uttered and retreated. The light circles made from the sword energy also retreated together with him. But all of a sudden, the light circles shrank briefly before growing into enormous shapes rapidly and gushing speedily toward Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong shook his wrist and thrust out his long sword; once again, with another cry of surprise, Mr. Paint leapt away in a hurry.

Thus with numerous quick charging forwards and quick retreats, within moments, Mr. Paint had attacked with eleven moves and retreated eleven times. By then, the reflections from his sword had grown severely from the accelerated attacks and painted a layer of blue on his face. His beard and mustache also looked as though they were all standing on their ends from the tense atmosphere. Amid a loud roar from Mr. Paint, dozens of light circles, some big and some small, shot toward Linghu Chong at the same time. This was the very peak of perfection in his sword art, with which he had combined dozens of sword moves into one. Every single one out of the dozens of sword moves contained fierce killer techniques, and each move had several variations. Once combined, the complexity was simply unrivaled.

Resisting complexity with simplicity, Linghu Chong squatted slightly and prodded his sword tip up from under the dozens of light circles, pointing directly at Mr. Paint's lower stomach. With another loud cry, Mr. Paint leapt backward with all his strength. "Bang!" he sat heavily on the

stone table from the fall. Next, several clatters echoed as the wine cups on the stone table fell to the floor from the sudden shake and smashed to pieces.

"Marvelous! Marvelous!" Mr. Paint broke into a loud laughter. "Brother Feng, your skills in the art of sword are much, much better than mine. Come, come, come! I propose three toasts for you!"

Mr. Black-White and Mr. Bald-Brush knew very well about their fourth brother's attainments in the art of sword. But without ever stepping out of the footprints made by Xiang Wentian, Linghu Chong successfully forced Mr. Paint back eighteen times during his sixteen attacking moves. The incredible sword skills Linghu Chong had shown were both admirable and frightening. Mr. Paint filled the wine cups and drank three cups together with Linghu Chong.

"Among the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, my Kung Fu is the weakest. Although I admit my defeat, Second Brother and Third Brother won't admit theirs. Probably they'll want to check you out themselves," he said.

"We did exchange many moves, but Fourth Master didn't lose in any one of them, how can we conclude the match with a winner?" Linghu Chong disagreed.

"I lost after the first move. The rest seventeen moves were all unnecessary. Big Brother says that I need to improve my demeanor. He is absolutely right." Mr. Paint shook his head.

"Fourth Master's demeanor is in very high standard, just like your tolerance of wine is also in very high standard," Linghu Chong said with a smile.

"Yeah! Yeah! Let's drink some more!" Mr. Paint grinned.

Being a man who thought highly of himself in the art of sword, Mr. Paint didn't have a single trace of irritation after losing to a not well-known at all junior swordsman. The negligent and open-minded grace he had shown was undoubtedly first-class. Both Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong felt great admiration for him.

"Shi, will you please go and get me my bald brush?" Mr. Bald-Brush said to Shi Lingwei.

Shi Lingwei answered and went out. Soon, he returned with a weapon and then presented the weapon to Mr. Bald-Brush with both hands respectfully.

Linghu Chong took a look at it, which turned out to be a Judge's Pen, one foot and six inches in length, cast in fine steel. The funny thing was that there was actually a bundle of wool, still with ink, tied to the end of the Judge's Pen, as though it was a real brush used for writing. For ordinary Judge's Pens, the head section was used to seal the enemy's Acupoints. But this pen here used the soft lamb wool as the pen's head. When it was used to strike people's Acupoints, how could it help in defeating the enemy in a real battle? Linghu Chong figured that Mr. Bald-Brush must know some special kind of Kung Fu; besides, he must possess very resourceful inner strength, so as soon as the inner energy is released, even lamb wool could be used to wound the enemy.

"Brother Feng, are you still going to stay in those two footprints?" taking the Judge's Pen into his hand, Mr. Bald-Brush asked with a grin.

Linghu Chong took two steps back at once. "I dare not! I am a junior asking pointers from a Senior Master, how dare I be overconfident?" He bowed.

"There you go!" Mr. Paint nodded. "When you had the sword contest with me, it was okay for you to stay put. But to fight my Third Brother, that wouldn't be wise."

Mr. Bald-Brush raised the Judge's Pen and smiled. "My stroke forms are all created from variations of famous calligraphy artists' masterpieces. Brother Feng is a man well versed in both polite letters and martial arts. I am sure you can easily recognize the way of my Judge's Pen moves. Brother Feng is a good friend, therefore, I won't dip this bald brush in ink."

Linghu Chong was slightly taken aback, thinking to himself, "If he didn't consider me a good friend, then he

would have dipped his brush in ink. What's going to happen if he does dip his brush in ink?"

He was unaware that the ink Mr. Bald-Brush dipped his brush in during real combats was actually made from stewing very special medicinal materials, and after the ink got on one's skin, the color would imprint deeply under the skin and could never be removed, whether by washing or scraping with a knife. In the former years when Martial masters had fought the "Four Playfellows of Jiangnan," Mr. Bald-Brush had been the one giving them the most headaches. If anyone had not been extra careful, he would end up with a circle, a cross, or even a word or two written on his face by the Mr. Bald-Brush, and then the rest of his life would have been completely ruined. People would rather take a hack or even lose an arm than having him drawing things on the face. Only because Mr. Bald-Brush saw how Linghu Chong showed great leniency in his match against Ding Jian and Mr. Paint, had he decided to not dip his brush in ink.

Even though Linghu Chong had no idea what Mr. Bald-Brush had meant, he figured that it must have been some kind of good intention. So he bowed.

"Many thanks for the great kindness. Unfortunately I am not very literate; I am sure I won't be able to recognize Third Master's brush strokes."

Mr. Bald-Brush was slightly disappointed. "You don't know calligraphy?" he said. "Okay, let me explain it to you first. The stroke form I am about to use is called 'General Pei Poem,'<sup>[79](#)</sup> which transformed from Yan Zhenqing's<sup>[80](#)</sup> calligraphy book. There are a total of twenty-three characters, and each character contains between three and sixteen moves. Now listen carefully: 'General Pei! The great lord that ruled the Six Directions!<sup>[81](#)</sup> The valiant general that guarded peace in the Nine Fields!<sup>[82](#)</sup> His war-horse as valorous as the dragon or tiger, galloping above the high mound with grand and heroic spirit!'"

"Thanks for the guidance," Linghu Chong replied, but inwardly, he thought, "You can explain about the poem or the calligraphy all you want. I know nothing about them anyhow."

Mr. Bald-Brush swung the big pen and pecked three times toward Linghu Chong's left cheek. These were none other than the first three strokes of the character "Pei." These three pecks were actually fake moves. Raising his big pen high in the air, he was just about delineate down from the top, when Linghu Chong suddenly thrust his long sword out in a preemptive strike and stabbed toward his right shoulder. Mr. Bald-Brush was forced into holding his big pen crosswise to block the strike, but by then Linghu Chong had already retracted his sword. Their two weapons did not collide with each other; both moves turned out to be fakes. But Mr. Bald-Brush was only able to execute half of the first move of the "General Pei" form and couldn't complete it.

After blocking only to thin air, Mr. Bald-Brush immediately launched the second move. Before the head of the pen had a chance to strike forward, Linghu Chong had already thrust at another spot where he had no alternative but to defend. Without delay, Mr. Bald-Brush swung his pen backward to fend it off, but Linghu Chong had retracted his long sword once again, and Mr. Bald-Brush's second wave terminated again only half way through.

Right from the beginning, Mr. Bald-Brush's two moves were both interrupted midway through. Not able to complete the pen form he was very proud of, Mr. Bald-Brush couldn't help but feel quite annoyed, as though a calligrapher had just picked up his brush to write, but only a few strokes into it, a naughty kid began catching his penholder or pulling his arms, and prevented him from finishing writing a character smoothly.

"I have already read the entire poem of 'General Pei Poem' to him beforehand. He knows the order of my strokes and is able to predict my moves and stop me ahead of time.

I'd better not follow the order of the characters with my later moves," Mr. Bald-Brush thought inwardly. After a fake dot, the big pen curved downward from the upper right corner to the lower left corner with abundant strength, writing the character "As" in the Grass Style. But Linghu Chong quickly pushed his long sword forward and pointed at his right rib cage. Astounded, Mr. Bald-Brush reversed the movement of the Judge's Pen and smash it toward Linghu Chong's long sword. Who would have expected that this stab of Linghu Chong's was not a real stab? All he really did was just showing the posture, but once again, Mr. Bald-Brush was only able to execute half of his move. With this Grass Style stroke, he had put out a great amount of energy and strength. When suddenly the movement was redirected, not only did the stroke become stagnant, his internal strength was also forced to reroute, which stirred up quite some energy disruption inside his lower stomach and caused indescribable discomfort.

After taking a deep breath, he waved his Judge's Pen rapidly in an attempt to finish the "Galloping" move, but only half way into it, he was forced to retract his Judge's Pen in defense by Linghu Chong's attack just as usual.

Mr. Bald-Brush was greatly irritated. "Hey chap! Stop putting sand in the wheels!" he bellowed as he accelerated his Judge's Pen's movement. But no matter how he sprang left and right transforming his moves, he was only able to write up to the second stroke with each character before being forced to stop by Linghu Chong's sword strikes.

Mr. Bald Brush uttered a loud roar, and suddenly the writing style changed completely. Before, the flow of the strokes was free and unrestrained; now the strokes turned thick and heavy, with the vigor passing through the center while the cutting edge appeared blustering and aggressive. The strokes looked straightforward yet grand at the same time.

Linghu Chong of course had no way of knowing that this stroke form was inspired by the calligraphy book “Mount Bameng Maxim” written by the famous Shu General Zhang Fei,<sup>83</sup> but he also noticed the dramatic change in the writing style. He couldn’t care for less as to what move his opponent was using, and every time as soon as he saw the Judge’s Pen move, he would attack its flaw.

Mr. Bald-Brush croaked in frustration, but regardless of his movements, he was only able to execute half of his move and never succeeded in completing the full move.

Suddenly, Mr. Bald-Brush’s writing style changed again and began writing the Grass Style in “Huai Su Self-Statting Book”<sup>84</sup> Now the strokes flutters in all directions and the flow of the writing became much unpredictable.

“Huai Su’s Grass Style calligraphy, by itself, was already very difficult to read. Now I am adding even more Grass Scripts to the Grass Style, I bet this chap won’t be able to recognize this self-made Grass Scripts of mine,” he thought to himself.

How could he have known that Linghu Chong couldn’t even read many characters written in the square-shaped regular scripts, not mentioning the unrestrained Grass Scripts? He had assumed that the only reason Linghu Chong succeeded in predicting his movement and stopping him ahead of time was because Linghu Chong had been able to read his writing, when in fact all Linghu Chong saw in his eyes were weapon moves and forms, and his successful striking to the cracks all attributed to attacking the flaws in the opponent’s moves.

Even with the Crazy Grass Style, Mr. Bald-Brush still could only go as far as half a move with each of his moves. Feeling the indignation growing rapidly inside his chest, he suddenly shouted out loudly.

“No more fight! No more fight!”

Leaping backward, he picked up that barrel of grape wine Mr. Paint had brought along and poured the wine onto the

stone table. Dipping his big pen in the wine, he began writing on the white wall, and it was none other that "General Pei Poem." All twenty-three characters appeared full of passion, especially the character "As," which looked as though it could have flown off the wall any minute.

After finishing off the writing, Mr. Bald-Brush finally let out a breath of relief. Turning his head sideways slightly, he admired the large characters on the white wall in dark red color, and laughed out loudly.

"Wonderful! Among my life-long artworks, this one is the finest," he concluded.

The more he looked at it, the prouder he became.

"Second Brother, can I take this game room from you? I'd hate to part with this calligraphy work. I am afraid that I'll never be able to write anything as good in the rest of my life," he requested.

"Fine," Mr. Black-White answered. "Other than the stone table, there's nothing else in this room anyway. Even if you don't want it, I'd have to move all the same. How can I ever focus on the game of go while facing the vigorous calligraphy of yours everyday?"

Mr. Bald-Brush stared at the several lines of calligraphy and wagged his head back and forth, feeling very pleased of himself.

"Even if the revered Mr. Yan was reborn, I am afraid he wouldn't be able to write something like this," he praised himself. Turning his head toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Hey buddy! It all thanks to you for keeping my ardors inside my belly until it was filled to the point of bursting, and then all of a sudden, they poured out from my heart through my hand and enabled me to create such splendid and unparalleled work under heaven. Your sword skills are excellent, and my calligraphy skills are also excellent. This is called each has his specialty and no winner can be claimed in this match."

"Exactly! Each has his specialty and no winner can be claimed in this match," Xiang Wentian agreed.



“Moreover, it was also because of my excellent wine!” Mr. Paint added.

“This Third Brother of mine is as innocent and artless as a child. Please note that he is simply crazy about calligraphy; it’s not that he does not admit he had lost the match.” Mr. Black-White explained.

“I understand,” Xiang Wentian answered. “The wager is that no one in the Plum Manor can beat Brother Feng’s sword art anyway, so as long as no winner can be claimed, we don’t lose our wager.”

“That’s correct!” Mr. Black-White nodded.

Reaching under the stone table, Mr. Black-White drew a square-shaped iron board from underneath. The iron board had nineteen horizontal lines and nineteen vertical lines engraved onto it. Turned out this was a game board cast in iron. Holding a corner of the iron game board, he said, “Brother Feng, let me using this game board as my weapon to check out your brilliant moves.”

“I’ve heard that Second Master’s game board is a magical treasure item that can control many kinds of weapons and projectiles,” Xiang Wentian said.

Mr. Black-White cast a long glance at him and then replied, “Brother Tong certainly has wide learning and a retentive memory. Very admirable! Very admirable! In fact, this weapon of mine is no magical item. It was made from magnets, so it would be able to attract game pieces made of iron, this way when I played games with other people while boarding boats or on horsebacks in former years, the game pieces would stay and allow us to continue with the game.”

“I see,” Xiang Wentian answered.

Hearing these words, Linghu Chong thought to himself, “Luckily Brother Xiang gave me the pointer ahead of time, otherwise, my long sword would have been attracted to his game board right from the start, and I’d have lost the match without the real fight. When I spar with this person, I have to make sure that I don’t let his game board touch my long

sword." At that thought, he pointed his long sword to the floor and then cupped his hands in salute.

"Second Master, thanks for giving me the opportunity to ask advice from you."

"I dare not. Brother Feng's understanding in the art of sword is brilliant. I have never seen extraordinary sword skills in my life. Please start!" Mr. Black-White said.

With a random slice Linghu Chong let his long sword wiggled in the air following an squiggly line.

"What kind of sword move is this?" Mr. Black-White hesitated for a fraction of a second. Seeing that the tip of the sword quickly approaching his own throat, he swung his game board and blocked. But Linghu Chong had redirected the stab and thrust his long sword toward his right shoulder. Without much thinking, Mr. Black-White moved the game board and blocked again. Before the long sword even approached the game board, Linghu Chong had retracted it and thrust it at Mr. Black-White's lower stomach instead, which Mr. Black-White blocked once again.

"If I don't counter attack, how do I take over the initiative?" Mr. Black-White thought inwardly.

In the game of go, it is very important to control the initiative of the game; in a martial arts competition, it is also critical to control the initiative. As an expert in the gamesmanship, Mr. Black-White of course was very familiar with this idea, so not wasting another moment, he raised his game board and pounded it toward Linghu Chong's right shoulder. The game board was about two feet wide and one inch thick. It was a very heavy piece of weapon. If it smashed into the long sword, even if the iron board didn't have magnetism, the long sword would still have been broken.

Turning his body slightly toward the side, Linghu Chong drove the sword toward the Mr. Black-White's lower rib cage. In Mr. Black-White's eyes, this thrust didn't look like a legitimate move at all, but the spot it was attacking certainly required attention. So he swung the game board in a tilted

angle to knock toward the long sword and at the same time pushed the game board forward. This move “Big Hosi”<sup>85</sup> was one that contained counterattacking in the defending. If Linghu Chong had to respond to this move, then his following moves would pour out in a steady stream. Who would have thought that Linghu Chong paid no attention to his move? Jabbing his long sword with an angle, Linghu Chong had launched a forestalled attack. Thus, Mr. Black-White’s defending move containing counterattacking function only had half the effect: the defending part worked but the counterattacking didn’t.

Afterwards, one thrust after another, Linghu Chong attacked over forty times without any delay. Mr. Black-White blocked left and warded right and defended his front and protected his back, putting up a defense shield so tight as though if one splashed water toward the shield, not even a drop of water would make it through, a very firm shield indeed. But they exchanged over forty moves, and Mr. Black-White’s over forty moves were all defending moves. He didn’t even have a spare second to launch one counterattacking move.

Mr. Bald-Brush, Mr. Paint, Ding Jian, and Shi Lingwei were completed stupefied. They could all see with their own eyes that Linghu Chong’s moves were neither quick, nor overwhelming, nor fierce, and the transformation between moves didn’t seem tricky or crafty, but every time when he thrust his long sword out, it would always put Mr. Black-White into straitened circumstances and make him work to make up for his flaws. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint both understood it very well that there is flaw in every single martial arts move. But if one could forestall and attack the opponent’s vital points first, then his own flaws would not have become flaws, and even if he had hundreds or even thousands of flaws, it would not have mattered. And the forty or so continuing attacking moves Linghu Chong showed simply followed this principle.

Mr. Black-White also felt the shock growing bigger and bigger in his heart. He really wanted to launch his own counterattack, but as soon as he moved the game board slightly, the sword tip of the opponent was already pointing toward the flaws in his own moves. Within the forty moves also, he simply had no chance to improve the situation, as though he was playing a game of go with someone who had much, much higher skills, and for every single one of the forty or so game pieces the opponent played, he had no choice but to respond. Mr. Black-White knew that if the fight had continued like this, then even after another one hundred or two hundred moves, he would still be in the same boat where he would keep taking hits and never be able to fight back.

“If I don’t take on some risks for a chance of success, then my illustrious name would have been completely ruined,” he thought to himself. Swinging his game board forward horizontally, he smashed it toward Linghu Chong’s left side waist in high speed. Once again, without dodge for the strike, Linghu Chong thrust his long sword toward Mr. Black-White’s lower stomach, but this time, Mr. Black-White didn’t retrieve his game board to defend and still smashed the game board forward as though he was ready to risk his life and have a common ruin with his opponent. At the time when the sword tip approached his stomach, he suddenly reached out with his left hand and clipped at the sword blade with his index finger and middle finger. He had mastered the “Profound Heavenly Finger” Kung Fu, and the two fingers carried immense inner strength, which was really no less than another powerful weapon.

Seeing Mr. Black-White using such a risky move, the five bystanders all cried out in shock. Such move would no longer qualify as a contest of skills, but rather a game of life and death. If he failed to catch the sword with his fingers, then the sword tip would undoubtedly end up penetrating his stomach. Within the fraction of an instant, all five of them felt

cold sweat in their palms. Mr. Black-White's two fingers were almost touching the sharp blade of the sword, and whether he could catch the blade or not, one out of the two sparring pair would for sure get wounded or get killed. If he did catch the blade, then Linghu Chong's long sword could not go any further, the game board would strike him in the waist, and he would not have any time to evade it. If he failed to catch the blade, or if he did catch the blade but failed to stop the long sword from going forward, then the long sword would continue with the thrust and even if Mr. Black-White wanted to leap back, he would have no time to do so.

Just at the instant when Mr. Black-White's finger barely touched the blade of the sword, the tip of the sword suddenly went upward and pointed at his throat. This change simply exceeded everybody's wildest imagination. Throughout all the martial arts in the history, there couldn't have ever had a move like this, because this would have meant that the first thrust toward the lower stomach was actually a fake. Using such a fake move in a fight between two top-notch martial artists would have been a joke. But even though this move did not comply with any orthodox principle in the art of sword, it did come out through Linghu Chong's hand. The sword tip prodded upward toward Mr. Black-White's throat. If Mr. Black-White's game board continued with the strike forward, the prod would have penetrated his throat first.

Utterly dumbstruck, Mr. Black-White used all his strength and held the game board still. He was a man with very quick wits and a master in gamesmanship, at the moment of the imminent peril, he immediately figured out the opponent's intention: if he aborted his strike with the game board, then the opponent's long sword would not prod forward either.

Sure enough, seeing that he held the game board still, Linghu Chong also froze the thrust with the long sword. The tip of the sword was only inches from his throat while his game board was also only inches from Linghu Chong's waist.

Both of them held their positions steady and froze like two lifeless statues.

Although it looked as if neither was willing to budge, Linghu Chong was really the one with all the advantages. The game board was a heavy item; only when it was striking down from several feet afar would it incur any damage. At present, it was only inches from Linghu Chong, even if Mr. Black-White decided to push it forward with lots of power, it wouldn't do Linghu Chong much harm, but all Linghu Chong had to do was to prod forward gently, and the sword tip would easily kill his opponent. It was pretty obvious for everyone to tell who was in better shoes.

"Well, neither dares to move first. That's called 'Dual Life' in the rule of go. Second Master is really both intelligent and courageous. You have ended up a draw in the match against Brother Feng," Xiang Wentian declared with a grin.

Linghu Chong withdrew his long sword and took two steps back. "Please excuse my boldness." He bowed.

"Brother Tong must be joking. How can one call this a draw? Brother Feng's understanding in the art of sword is incomparable. I just had a crushing defeat," Mr. Black-White muttered.

"Second Brother, your Kung Fu with your game piece darts is a unique skill in the Martial World. Nobody could ever escape it when you shoot out the three hundred and sixty-one black and white game pieces. Why don't you check out this Brother Feng's Kung Fu in breaking darts?" Mr. Paint suggested.

Mr. Black-White felt a throb in his heart. He glanced at Xiang Wentian, who nodded slightly a few times. Turning his head to look at Linghu Chong, he found no expression on Linghu Chong's face.

"This one's sword skills are to the extreme," he thought secretly, "in the entire world, that person probably is the only one who could defeat him. The look on those two's faces suggested that they had great confidence. If I have another

contest of darts, most probably I'll end up making myself a fool one more time."

At that thought, he shook his head and showed a wry smile, "I have already admitted my defeat. What's the need for another match of darts?"

# **Chapter 20: Imprisonment**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**





**Linghu Chong picked up the bamboo flute and waved gently. Air flew through the holes on the flute and made several soft tones. Mr. Huang-Zhong plunked the strings a couple of times with his right hand, in the echoing, the end of the zither was already on its way towards Linghu Chong's right shoulder.**

“Brother Tong, will you please let me take another look at your calligraphy book?” still concerned about the “Willful Book” by Zhang Xu, Mr. Bald-Brush begged.

“As soon as First Master defeats my Brother Feng, the book will be part of Third Master’s private collection. Even if you want to look at it for three days and three nights in succession, that’s your own call,” Xiang Wentian said with a grin.

“I’ll look at it for seven days and seven nights in succession!” Mr. Bald-Brush exclaimed.

“Okay, you’ll look at it for seven days and seven nights then,” Xiang Wentian replied.

Mr. Bald-Brush felt his heart itching with that possibility. “Second Brother,” he called out, “I’ll go ask Big Brother to have the match. What do you think?”

“You two stay here to accompany our guests. I’ll go talk to Big Brother,” Mr. Black-White arranged and then stepped out of the room.

“Brother Feng, let’s drink,” Mr. Paint suggested. “Alas, much of this barrel of wine was wasted by Third Brother.” He poured the wine into the wine cups.

“Wasted?” Mr. Bald-Brush rebuffed angrily. “When you drink the wine into your belly, it will only turn into urine and get relieved. How can that even be comparable to the fact that it will now stay on the white wall as calligraphy artwork and last for the eternity? Your wine will only live on because of the calligraphy. One thousand years later, only when people have seen my calligraphy art would they be able to know that this barrel of Turpan red wine ever existed.”

Facing the white wall, Mr. Paint raised his cup. "Hello wall, you are so fortunate to be able to taste the wonderful wine brewed by your Fourth Master, himself. Even if my Third Brother didn't write calligraphy on your face, you...you...you would have lasted for the eternity."

"Compared to this ignorant wall, I am much more fortunate to be able to taste such wonderful rare-even-in-one-thousand-year wine," Linghu Chong showed a big smile. Raising his own cup, he drank it up.

After drinking two cups in accompany by the side, Xiang Wentian stopped drinking, but Mr. Paint and Linghu Chong kept pouring wine down their throats and found their exhilaration surging.

After they each had at least another seventeen or eighteen cups, Mr. Black-White finally returned.

"Brother Feng, my Big Brother would like to meet you. Please come with me. And is it okay if Brother Tong stays here and enjoy some more wine?" he said.

"Well...", Xiang Wentian was taken by surprise. He could see clearly that Mr. Black-White had no intention of inviting him to tag along, and he couldn't insist on going after all. "What a pity for life that it's not my karma to have the honor in meeting First Master," he sighed.

"Please pardon me, Brother Tong. My Big Brother has been living in seclusion for many years and has repeatedly declined our guests' requests for an audience. It is only because he heard that Brother Feng's skills in the art of sword have reached the extreme and felt his admiration soaring, did he decide to invite Brother Feng for a private meeting. We certainly dare not to show any disrespect to Brother Tong," Mr. Black-White explained.

"I understand. I understand," Xiang Wentian replied.

Setting his wine cup down on the table, Linghu Chong followed Mr. Black-White out of the game room. He went empty-handed, thinking that it would be inappropriate to

bring a long sword with him in the meeting with the lord of the manor.

They crossed through a long corridor and soon arrived at a moon-shaped entry. The tablet above the entry read "Zither Spirit." The words were made of blue colored glaze and showed vigorous style, most likely the creation of Mr. Bald-Brush. After the moon-shaped entry, a quiet and deep flower-strewn pathway extended further. On both sides of the pathway, thin and long bamboos swayed leisurely in the breeze. The cobblestones in the pathway were covered by moss, clearly indicating that this was a path seldom used. At the end of the pathway were three stone buildings. Seven or eight dark green pine trees stood at the front and the back, each towering high with their branches extending gracefully in all directions, casting a layer of gloom to the surroundings.

Mr. Black-White slowly pushed the door open. "Please come in," he said in a gentle voice.

As soon as Linghu Chong entered the room, he smelled the pleasant fragrance of sandalwood.

"Big Brother, Huashan School's Young Hero Feng is here," Mr. Black-White introduced.

An old man walked out from the bedroom, cupping one hand in the other. "Please excuse my lack of manners for having not greeted Young Hero Feng properly. It is a great honor to have Young Hero Feng in our humble manor."

The old man appeared to be about sixty years of age. Thin as a lath, and with the muscles on his face sinking deeply, he looked more like a skeleton with the exception of the two bright piercing eyes.

"It was I who took the liberty for the unannounced visit. I'll have to ask for Senior Master's pardon," Linghu Chong said with a bow.

"That's quite alright," the man answered.

"My Big Brother's name is Mr. Huang-Zhong.<sup>86</sup> I am sure Young Hero Feng has known that already," Mr. Black-White said.

"I have long heard the great names of the four Manor Masters. It is so fortunate that I finally get to meet you in person today," Linghu Chong said as he thought to himself, "This is quite a joke that Big Brother Xiang has played on me. He didn't tell me anything beforehand and only told me to let him arrange everything. But now he is nowhere near me. If this First Master here gives me some difficult puzzles to solve, I wonder how I should handle them."

"I heard that Young Hero Feng is the very disciple of the venerable Grandmaster Feng of the Huashan School and possesses brilliant sword skills," Mr. Huang-Zhong said. "I've always admired Grandmaster Feng's conducts and his martial arts skills very much. It is such a pity that I never had the honor to meet him. Some time back, it was said around the Martial World that the venerable Grandmaster Feng had passed away. The news brought deep sorrow in my heart. Today, to have the opportunity to meet venerable Grandmaster Feng's disciple is very gratifying. Is Young Hero Feng a descendent of Grandmaster Feng?"

Linghu Chong thought inwardly, "Grand Uncle-Master Feng earnestly exhorted me to not reveal his whereabouts. Once Big Brother Xiang saw my sword techniques, he figured out that it must have been Grand Uncle-Master who taught me those. He not only wantonly made that widely known, but also claimed that my last name was none other than Feng, which probably had a good amount of swindle and bluff. But if I tell the truth straightforward, it wouldn't be appropriate, either." At that thought, he gave an ambiguous answer, "I am a junior of his later generation. I've only studied from him for a short while. Being a slow learner, simple and uninformed, I haven't even mastered ten or twenty percent of his sword arts."

"If it is true that you have only learned ten to twenty percent of Grandmaster Feng's sword arts, yet my three brothers have all lost to your long sword, then venerable

Grandmaster Feng's attainments had to be fathomless," Mr. Huang-Zhong sighed.

"The three Masters only each exchanged a few random moves with me, and before any of the matches had any result, they had already held back their hands," Linghu Chong said.

Mr. Huang-Zhong nodded, his skinny face revealing a slight smile. "It is rare to see a young man free from arrogance and rashness. Please come in to the Zither Hall and have some tea," he said.

Linghu Chong and Mr. Black-White followed him into the Zither Hall and seated. Soon, a servant boy brought out green tea.

"I heard that Young Hero Feng has the ancient music score of the 'Guang-Ling Song.' Is it true?" Mr. Huang-Zhong asked. "I am rather fond of music. And I've always bemoaned when I thought of how Ji Kang played the 'Guang-Ling Song' with his zither one last time just before his execution, exclaiming, 'Guang-Ling Song would be lost for ever from now on.' If this music can reappear in the world, and I get to follow the music score and play it once in my old age, I would have no regret left in this life." At these words, his pale face actually showed some redness of skin, looking earnest and anxious.

"Big Brother Xiang's one lie after another really fooled them well," Linghu Chong thought to himself. "I can tell that these four Masters of the Plum Manor of the Lone Hill are no ordinary people. Besides, I am here to ask them to treat my injury. How can I keep them guessing? If this music score is really the 'Guang-Ling Song' Senior Master Qu Yang obtained from the tomb of that Cai-Somebody of the East Han Dynasty, I should let him take a look."

Retrieving the music score from his chest pocket, he stood up and then presented it with both hands. "Please take a look, First Master."

Mr. Huang-Zhong raised himself slightly and took the booklet. "The 'Guang-Ling Song' music had been long lost in the world. It is so exhilarating to be able to take a look at the legendary ancient score. But...but I wonder...." He seemed to implicate that how would he be sure that this music score was the authentic "Gang-Ling Song," not a counterfeit some busybody had faked to fool people.

He thumbed through a few pages at random and then muttered, "Oh, this is a long piece." Turning back to the first page, he began reading the details. Only moments into it, his face had changed color. Flipping through the music score with his right hand, he set his left hand on the table and the five fingers plucked, twiddled, and pressed as though he was playing an invisible zither.

"Marvelous! Peaceful and fair, yet melodious and deep to the extreme," he praised.

Turning to the second page, he read for a little while and then praised again, "Lofty and elegant, profound and abstruse. Just by imagining the sounds in my head, I can already feel the utter exhilaration."

Seeing how Mr. Huang-Zhong was already slightly out of his mind after reading only two pages of the music score, Mr. Black-White knew that if he kept reading, it would be hours before he'll even take a break. So he cut in.

"This Young Hero Feng here and a Brother Tong from the Songshan School came here and said that if someone in the Plum Manor can defeat his sword art...."

"Um, only if someone can defeat his sword art will he be willing to loan me the 'Guang-Ling Song' and make a copy, is that right?" Mr. Huang-Zhong asked.

"That's right! All three of us have lost our matches. Unless Big Brother takes the field, our Plum Manor of the Lone Hill...well..." Mr. Black-White replied.

"If you can't do it, I can't either," Mr. Huang-Zhong let out a light smile.

"How can the three of us be comparable with Big Brother?" Mr. Black-White said.

"I am too old. I am of no use now," Mr. Huang-Zhong replied.

Linghu Chong got back onto his feet. "First Master's name is 'Mr. Huang-Zhong,' then naturally you are an expert in the art of zither," he said. "Although this music score is rare, it is not classified secret or anything. First Master, please feel free to hold on to it and make copies. I can come back to pick it up three days from now."

Mr. Huang-Zhong and Mr. Black-White were both taken aback. Mr. Black-White had witnessed, himself, how Xiang Wentian had worked hard at baiting them, deliberately making things more difficult and made his heart itchy as hell. He certainly did not expect to see such a generous Feng Er-Zhong. Being an expert in the art of gamesmanship, he immediately concluded that this had to be a trap Linghu Chong was setting up to trick Mr. Huang-Zhong, but no matter how hard he tried, he still failed catch any clue.

"One does not receive a reward without making a merit. You and I don't have any prior association. How could I accept such a generous gift from you? Will you please be very frank with me and tell me the real reason for you and your companion's visit to our humble manor?" Mr. Huang-Zhong asked.

Linghu Chong thought, "Big Brother Xiang didn't mention a word to me about why we are visiting the Plum Manor beforehand. I suppose it must have something to do with asking the four Manor Masters to treat my injury. But all his arrangements seemed so secretive. Besides, the four Manor Masters are all very unusual people. Perhaps telling them the truth isn't the right way to address the issue. I honestly don't have a clue about the intention of Big Brother Xiang's visit, anyway. I guess telling them this part frankly wouldn't count as trying to deceive them intentionally." So he said, "I was only accompanying Big Brother Tong in the



visit to your respectable manor. To be very honest with you, before stepping into your respectable manor, I have never heard of the names of the four Manor Masters, nor was I ever aware of the existence of the Plum Manor of the Lone Hill." After a short pause, he added, "That is, of course, only because I am ignorant and ill-informed, and consequently failed to recognize the many respectable senior masters in the Martial World. I beg the two Masters' pardon."

Mr. Huang-Zhong cast a glance toward Mr. Black-White and a smile crept onto his face.

"Young Hero Feng is very candid, and I am very thankful. Us, the four brothers, retired to the city of Lin-An to live a hermit's life; few people in the Martial World knows about it. Besides, the Five Mountains Sword Alliance never had any association with us, so I was quite surprised to learn about your visit. So Young Hero Feng really has no idea about the origin of us the four brothers, have you?"

"This is so embarrassing. When I said earlier that 'I have long heard the great names of the four Manor Masters,' actually...actually...well..." Linghu Chong murmured.

Mr. Huang-Zhong nodded. "Mr. Huang-Zhong, Mr. Black-White and so forth are only nicknames we picked for ourselves. Our true names have long been abandoned. It is only natural that Young Hero Feng has never heard of our names," he said. Turning the music score booklet with his right hand, he asked, "Are you sincere about loaning this music score to me and let me make copies?"

"Yes," Linghu Chong affirmed. "I said loaning the book to you only because the music score belongs to Big Brother Tong. Otherwise, you can just go ahead and take it. Like the old saying says, 'A precious sword should be presented to a person of high endeavor.' Once presented, there's no need to return it."

Mr. Huang-Zhong let out a long breath, and a trace of joy quickly flashed across his emaciated face.

"You agree to loan the music score to my Big Brother. But will that Brother Tong agree as well?" Mr. Black-White asked.

"Big Brother Tong and I are friends until death. He is bold and generous. If I agree to something, no matter how important the matter is, he wouldn't mind at all," Linghu Chong assured, to which Mr. Black-White gave a nod.

"I am very grateful for Young Hero Feng's kindness. But since Brother Tong did not give his consent, himself, I am still very uneasy about it. That Brother Tong said that in order to get the music score, someone from our manor must be able to defeat your sword arts. It would be unfair for me to take advantage of your generosity. Why don't we exchange a few moves?" Mr. Huang-Zhong proposed.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "The Second Master said just a moment ago, 'How can the three of us be comparable with Big Brother?' Then the Kung Fu skills of the First Master must have been superior to the other three Manor Masters. The three Manor Masters each had unsurpassed Kung Fu skills, and only with the sword techniques I learned from Grand Uncle-Master Feng was I able to get the upper hand in the matches. If I spar with the First Master, I may not win again. Why bother bringing shame onto myself for no reason? Even if I could beat him in the match, what good does it do?" At that thought, he said, "Big Brother Tong was just seized by a whim and being meddlesome when he said something like that, which only embarrassed me more. I am already thankful that the four Manor Masters decide to spare me of reprimand for my arrogance. How dare I spar again with the First Master?"

"You are quite all right," Mr. Huang-Zhong smiled. "Let's exchange a few moves, and it'll just be a harmless contest. That is all. What's there to worry about?"

He turned around, removed a jade flute from the wall and handed it to Linghu Chong. "You can use the flute as your sword. I, on the other hand, will use my zither as my weapon." Picking up a zither from the bedside table, he said

with a grin, "I wouldn't say that these two musical instruments of mine are invaluable, but each of them is one in a thousand. I certainly do not want them to smash into pieces. Let's just put out some stances for the act. That's all."

Linghu Chong took a closer look at the flute in his hand. The entire body of the flute was in emerald green. Turned out that it was made of top-quality jade. The several spots close to the mouthpiece were in bright scarlet, and perfectly set off the striking green of the jade flute. The zither held in Mr. Huang-Zhong's hands appeared dark and ancient. It must have been an antique over one thousand years old. A gentle bump of the two musical instruments would have broken them into pieces. They of course couldn't be used in a real fight. Having no other excuses, he held the jade flute with both hands and spoke respectfully.

"I await First Master's advice."

"The venerable Grandmaster Feng was the ultimate swordsman of the generation. I've always had great admiration for him. The sword arts he taught must be extraordinary. Young Hero Feng, please!" Mr. Huang-Zhong said.

Holding the flute in his palm, Linghu Chong gave it a gentle swing. A few soft sounds echoed pleasantly as air went through the holes on the flute.

Mr. Huang-Zhong gave a few plucks to the strings of the zither. Amid the musical sounds, he pushed the end of the zither toward Linghu Chong's right shoulder.

At the sound of the zither, Linghu Chong felt a slight thump in his heart. He slowly dabbed the jade flute toward the back of Mr. Huang-Zhong's elbow. If the zither continued its course toward his shoulder, then the acupoint at the back of Mr. Huang-Zhong's elbow would have been hit first.

Turning the zither upside down, Mr. Huang-Zhong shoved it toward Linghu Chong's waist, instead. And as the zither struck forward, he plucked the strings and made more sounds.

Linghu Chong thought quickly, "If I block this strike with the jade flute, once the two precious instruments clashes, both would be damaged. In order to preserve the musical instruments, he will certainly withdraw the zither. But fighting like that is really no different from the shameless act of a rascal."

With that in mind, he drew an arc with the jade flute and stabbed it below the opponent's armpit. Mr. Huang-Zhong raised his zither in an attempt to ward it off, but Linghu Chong quickly drew his flute back.

Suddenly, Mr. Huang-Zhong played several consecutive notes with the zither and the sound of the music turned pressing and the complexion on Mr. Black-White's face changed slightly. Slowly, Mr. Black-White backed out of the Zither Hall, shutting the door on his way out. knowing that Mr. Huang-Zhong was, by no means, showing his leisure when he made the musical notes with the zither. He had actually infused superior inner strength into the zither sounds in order to disrupt his opponent's concentration. Once the opponent's internal strength resonated with the zither sounds, then he would be controlled by the zither sounds involuntarily. When the zither music slowed down, the opponent's movement would also slow down; when the zither music hurried, the opponent's movement would also hurry. But the tempo of Mr. Huang-Zhong's zither moves would be just the opposite to the tempo of the zither music. His strikes would become faster and faster while the zither music turned more soothing and relaxing, as a result, the opponent would stand no chance of withstanding his attacks. Mr. Black-White knew very well that this Kung Fu of Mr. Huang-Zhong was no trivia matter. Afraid that his own internal strength would be worn off, he receded out of the Zither Hall.

Although the door plank separated him from the Zither Hall, he could still vaguely hear the zither music slowing down and going faster from time to time. Sometimes, the

zither sound would suddenly silence, while some other times, the zither sound would all of a sudden clang very loudly. After a while, the tempo of the zither music became faster and faster. Mr. Black-White only felt his heart fluttering with uneasiness and even his breathing became somewhat uncomfortable. Backed out of the front door, he, once again, shut the front door tight. Now with two doors in between, the sound of the zither was almost inaudible. But occasionally when the sound of the zither turned sonorous and passed through all the barriers, it always made his heart thump faster.

He stood there for a good while but the zither sounds kept going and going. He was astounded. "This young man named Feng, no doubt, has excellent sword skills. But it turned out that his cultivation in inner strength is also so capable. How is he able to hold out for so long under the attack of my Big Brother's 'Seven-String Invisible Sword'?" he thought. As he pondered upon the question, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint arrived side by side.

"How did it go?" Mr. Paint asked in a low voice.

"The fight has lasted a long time. That young man is still struggling to keep up. I am afraid Big Brother will end up injuring him," Mr. Black-White said.

"I'll go ask Big Brother to show leniency. We can't hurt this good friend," Mr. Paint suggested.

"We can't go in there," Mr. Black-White shook his head.

Just at that moment, loud clanking sounds from the zither suddenly exploded in the air. At the first sound, the three of them each took one step back. So after five consecutive zither sounds, the three of them took a total of five steps back involuntarily.

Mr. Bald-Brush's face turned as white as a sheet. After taking a few seconds to collect himself, he said, "This 'Six-Ding-God Quarry a Mountain' move of Big Brother's Invisible Sword Art is too powerful. The six consecutive notes continue

to wallop and strike one after another. How can that young man Feng withstand it?"

Before he even finished his sentence, another loud clank exploded, and immediately after that, several cracking sounds followed, as though several zither strings had suddenly snapped. Astounded, Mr. Black-White and the other two pushed the front door wide open and dashed in. As soon as they opened the door of the Zither Hall, they saw a dispirited Mr. Huang-Zhong standing still in silence. All seven strings of the zither in his grip had snapped and drooped by the side of the zither. Standing by his side was Linghu Chong, holding the jade flute in his hand.

"Please pardon me!" Linghu Chong said, bowing down slightly.

Obviously, just like the others, Mr. Huang-Zhong had lost the match.

Mr. Black-White and his two junior brothers gasped in astonishment. They knew very well that their Big Brother had very vigorous and resourceful inner strength and was, in fact, an extraordinary figure in the Martial World. Who would have expected that he would lose to this young man from the Huashan School just as well? If they hadn't seen it with their own eyes, they would never have believed it.

"Not only is Young Hero Feng's sword art the most ingenious sword art I have ever seen in my life, his inner strength cultivation is also so incredibly capable. It is very admirable, indeed," Mr. Huang-Zhong said with a wry smile. "I had always thought that this 'Seven-String Invisible Sword' Kung Fu of mine could be regarded as a consummate skill in the Martial World. Who would have thought that it looked merely like a child's play in front of Young Hero Feng? We, the four brothers, have been living a hermit's life in the Plum Manor and haven't set foot in the Martial World for more than ten years. Alas, turned out we have all become frogs living at the bottom of a well."<sup>87</sup> His voice turned bleak.

"I had to do my utmost to keep up. Thanks for Senior Master's leniency," Linghu Chong said.

Mr. Huang-Zhong heaved a long sigh, but did not answer. Shaking his head dishearteningly, he sat down, his face dreary and desolate.

Seeing the utter gloominess on Mr. Huang-Zhong's face, Linghu Chong felt very sorry. He thought to himself, "Big Brother Xiang apparently did not want to review the fact that I have lost all my inner strength, so as not to make them aware of my intent to ask for treatment, thus, void any obstacles that might arise. But a real man should be as open as the day. I can't take advantage of him like that." At that thought, he said, "First Master, there's something I must tell. The reason why I was immune to the invisible energy attacks coming out of your zither was not because of advanced inner strength cultivation on my part. It was really because I have no inner strength in me, none whatsoever!"

"What did you say?" Mr. Huang-Zhong stood up, taken by surprise.

"I was injured many times and have lost all my inner strength. That's why the sound of your zither had no effect on me," Linghu Chong explained.

"Are you serious?" Mr. Huang-Zhong asked, his voice quavered from mingled shock and joy.

"If Senior Master does not believe me, check my pulse and you'll see," Linghu Chong replied and extended his right hand forward.

Mr. Huang-Zhong and Mr. Black-White were both taken completely by surprise. In their minds, although Linghu Chong's coming to the Plum Manor was not hostile, he must have been up to no good, after all. How could he give out his hand so unperturbedly and hand his lifelines over to others? If Mr. Huang-Zhong suddenly grabbed hold of the acupoint on his wrist using the pretext of checking his pulse, then even if he had all the skills in the world, he would not be able

to use any of them and wind up being at the mercy of others like a piece of meat sitting on the chopping block.

Earlier, when Mr. Huang-Zhong had initiated his “Six-Ding-God Quarry a Mountain” Kung Fu, not only had it failed to affect Linghu Chong in the least, at the peak of his inner strength discharge when all seven strings resonated, he actually ended up breaking seven strings all together. Such a crushing defeat was certainly hard to resign to. “If you want me to reach my hand forward so you can clasp the acupoint on my wrist, then we’ll just have another contest in the inner strength,” he made up his mind and then slowly stretched his right hand forward toward the artery on Linghu Chong’s right wrist. In the stretch, he had secretly included the “Tiger Claw Technique”, the “Dragon Claw Skill”, and the “Small Joints Eighteen Holding Positions” these three advanced joint manipulation Kung Fu, so regardless of what moves the opponent might execute, when worst comes to worst, he would simply fail to grab the opponent’s wrist, but his opponent would not be able to take any advantage of him, either.

But when Mr. Huang-Zhong’s five fingers touched Linghu Chong’s wrist, Linghu Chong didn’t even move a muscle, showing no sign of an attack. Slightly taken aback, Mr. Huang-Zhong quickly noticed how feeble and frail Linghu Chong’s pulses were, clearly indicating that he had no inner strength at all. After a short daze, he suddenly broke into loud laughter.

“I see! So that’s how it is! You bamboozled me! You have really bamboozled me well!”

Although he kept saying that he was bamboozled, the expression on his face was actually very delightful. His “Seven-String Invisible Sword” Kung Fu was only made up of zither sounds. The sound itself of course could not injure the enemy. All it did was to stimulate and manipulate the enemy’s inner strength, thus disrupting the enemy’s moves. The stronger the enemy’s inner strength was, the stronger his



reaction to the zither sound would turn out. He certainly had not expected Linghu Chong to have no inner strength at all, and consequently, the "Seven-String Invisible Sword" having the least bit of effect on him. Having suffered a severe defeat, Mr. Huang-Zhong had been completely disheartened. But after he found out that the reason he lost the match was not because his unique skill, which he trained for many decades diligently, was no good, he found himself wild with joy. Grabbing Linghu Chong's hand tightly, he shook it back and forth in excitement.

"Good Brother! Good Brother! Why are you telling me your secret?" he asked, beaming.

"Well, during our match, it was already quite selfish of me to conceal the fact that I lost all my inner strength. How could I keep deceiving you on that? Senior Master was playing music to an ox, and I just happen to be the ox that understood none of the elegance." Linghu Chong grinned.

"I guess my 'Seven-String Invisible Sword' is no garbage after all. For a moment, I thought my 'Seven-String Invisible Sword' actually turned into 'Broken-String Unusable Sword'. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" Mr. Huang-Zhong stroked his long beard and let out more laughter.

"Young Hero Feng! We, the four brothers, are very grateful for your honesty. But didn't you know that once you reveal your own weakness, if we want to take your life, it would be as easy as turning our hands over? Although you have excellent sword skills, without any inner strength, you will be no match for us after all," Mr. Black-White said.

"Second Master is absolutely right. I only told the truth because I can tell that the four Manor Masters are all trustworthy heroes," Linghu Chong replied.

"Well said! Well said!" Mr. Huang-Zhong nodded at those words. "Brother Feng, you might as well speak frankly and tell us your intention for your visit. We, the four brothers feel like you are almost an old friend of ours even though this is

the first time we ever meet. As far as our capacity allows, you can ask us for anything."

Mr. Bald-Brush also said, "You lost all your inner strength most probably because of a severe injury. I have a very intimate friend whose medical skills are almost godlike. Only that he is kind of eccentric and wouldn't take in patients easily. But for my sake, I am sure he'd be willing to treat you. The 'Killer Doctor' Ping One-Finger and I have been good friends...."

"Did you say Ping One-Finger, Doctor Ping?" Linghu Chong cried out involuntarily.

"That's right. You've heard of his name before, haven't you?" Mr. Bald-Brush answered.

"Doctor Ping passed away on the Five-Tyrant Ridge in Shandong Province several months ago." Linghu Chong's voice turned gloomy.

"What?" Mr. Bald-Brush cried out in shock. "He...he died?"

"He could have cured any disease in the world. How come he wasn't able to cure his own illness? Oh, was he killed by his personal enemy?" Mr. Paint asked.

Linghu Chong shook his head. He had always felt ashamed of himself for the death of Ping One-Finger.

"Doctor Ping checked my pulse right before he passed away. He said that my injury was too weird and he could not cure me."

The sudden news of Ping One-Finger's death struck Mr. Bald-Brush hard. He stared blankly in front of him and soon tears emerged from his eyes.

"Brother Feng, let me point you a direction. But whether he'll do it or not, it's hard to say," after pondering for a long while, Mr. Huang-Zhong finally said. "I'll write you a letter, and you can take the letter with you and request an audience from the Head Master of the Shaolin Temple, Great Master Fang-Zheng. If he agrees to teach you the ultimate inner strength Kung Fu of the Shaolin School, the Tendon

Altering Sutra, then there is a good chance that you'll be able to regain your inner strength. The Tendon Altering Sutra is the most valued Kung Fu of the Shaolin School, which is not to be taught to any outsider. But many years ago, Great Master Fang-Zheng owed me some gratitude. Maybe he'll do me a favor for personal consideration and make an exception."

Linghu Chong knew that both Mr. Bald-Brush's recommendation of Ping One-Finger and Mr. Huang-Zhong's direction to Great Master Fang-Zheng were both right to the core of the problem, and both recommendations were made wholeheartedly. It was obvious that the two Manor Masters were not only exceptionally insightful, but also sincerely zealous about his wellbeing. Feeling utterly grateful, he said, "Great Master Fang-Zheng only teaches the 'Tendon Altering Sutra' to apprentices of his own school, but it wouldn't be proper for me to join the Shaolin School. It is very difficult situation."

After standing up and making a deep bow, he spoke again, "I am very grateful for the four Manor Masters' kindness. Life and death lie in the lap of the gods. My injury is really not a big deal, and it is certainly not my intention to worry the four Manor Masters. I think it's time for me to say good-bye."

"Please wait," Mr. Huang-Zhong said. Turning around, he went into the inner room, and not long after, he returned with a small china bottle in his hand. "Here are two herbal pills bestowed upon me by my respectable Master many years ago. They are quite effective in nourishing health and healing wounds. Please accept them as my gift, little brother, as a small token to celebrate our meeting today."

The cork on the small bottle appeared worn and ancient. Linghu Chong knew that if Mr. Huang-Zhong had kept this relic from his deceased Master for all these years, they had to be very precious. So he replied immediately, "These pills

were bestowed from Senior Master's respectable Master, not just any ordinary pills. I dare not accept it!"

Mr. Huang-Zhong shook his head. "The four of us have separated ourselves from the Martial World for many years and no longer strive with other people. These catholicons for injuries are really no good to us. The four brothers of us have neither apprentices, nor children. If you insist on declining, I suppose these two pills would only end up accompanying me in my coffin."

Sensing the bleakness in Mr. Huang-Zhong's voice, Linghu Chong did not insist any further and accepted the gift, thanking him earnestly. After bidding his farewell, he headed back to the Game Room with Mr. Black-White, Mr. Bald-Brush, and Mr. Paint accompanying by the side. As soon as Xiang Wentian spotted the solemn expression on the four's faces, he knew immediately that Linghu Chong must have won yet another sword match against the First Master of the manor. If the First Master had won the match, then even though Mr. Black-White might still maintain his composure, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint, fore sure, would have turned daring and militant, demanding Zhang Xu's calligraphy book and Fan Kuan's painting from him at the first sight of him.

"Brother Feng, did First Master give you some good pointers as regard to your sword skills?" he asked, pretending he had not a clue.

"The prowess of First Master's inner strength was simply unimaginable. But it just happens that I have lost all my inner strength and therefore, did not react to the inner strength released from First Master's zither at all. It was such incredible luck on my side," Linghu Chong explained.

"This Brother Feng here is an honest gentleman and did not keep back anything. Why did you say that his inner strength was far superior to yours and deceive my Big Brother big time?" Mr. Paint reprehended, glaring at Xiang Wentian as he spoke.

"But at the time when Brother Feng still had his inner strength, his inner strength was indeed far superior to mine. I was referring to before, not now," Xiang Wentian grinned.

"You are a bad person!" Mr. Bald-Brush grunted.

"Well, since no one in the Plum Manor can defeat my Brother Feng's sword. Three Manor Masters, I think it's time for us to say good-bye," Xiang Wentian cupped his hands. Turning toward Linghu Chong, he said, "Let's go."

Linghu Chong also cupped his hands and bowed. "It was a great pleasure to meet the four Manor Masters today. If the chance rises up in the future, I'll visit your Manor once again."

"Brother Feng, if you feel like coming over to drink some wine, you can come any day. I'll let you taste all the great wines I collected throughout the years. But in regard to this Brother Tong here, well! Well!" Mr. Paint said.

"With my small capacity for liquor, I certainly dare not to come and ask for trouble." Xiang Wentian showed a smile.

After cupping his hands one more time, he walked out, holding Linghu Chong's arms. Mr. Black-White and the others also walked out.

"Three Manor Masters please don't bother to see us out," Xiang Wentian said.

"Ha, do you think we are seeing you out? We are here to see Brother Feng off. If you had come all by yourself, Brother Tong, just watch us and see how many steps we'll take to see you off," Mr. Bald-Brush said.

"I see," Xiang Wentian grinned.

Mr. Black-White and the others walked all the way out of the manor gate before saying good-bye to Linghu Chong. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint stared at Xiang Wentian all the way out. How they wished they could just snatch the package off Xiang Wentian's back.

Holding Linghu Chong's hand, Xiang Wentian walked deep into the willow woods. When they were far from the Plum Manor, he finally asked, smiling, "Brother, the First

Master's 'Invisible Sword' energy from his zither is very powerful. How did you manage to defeat him?"

"Oh, so Big Brother knew everything already. Luckily I have lost all my inner strength, or else I am afraid I probably would have lost my life over that. Big Brother, did you have some scores to settle with these four Manor Masters?" Linghu Chong asked.

"No. I'd never even met them before today, what scores could there be?" Xiang Wentian answered.

Suddenly, shouts came from behind. "Brother Tong! Brother Feng! Please come back."

Linghu Chong turned around and then saw Mr. Paint running toward him in quick trots. He held a bowl in his hand, which was more than half full with wine.

"Brother Feng, I have half a bottle of more than one-hundred-year old Bamboo-Green. You'd really regret it if you didn't have a taste," he said, handing the bowl over as he spoke.

Linghu Chong took the bowl and then took a look. The wine inside the bowl was so green that it almost looked like one solid emerald stone and he couldn't even see the bottom of the bowl. The strong and mellow smell of the wine soon filled his nostrils. "Great wine, indeed!" he praised.

"Excellent!" after a small sip of the wine, he praised again. Then with another four quick gulps, he poured the entire content of the bowl down his throat. "The flavor of the wine tastes mild yet rich at the same time. It had to be the product from around the city of Yangzhou or Zhenjiang," he commented.

"Right on!" Mr. Paint beamed with delight. "This is the ultimate treasure of the Golden-Hill Temple in Zhenjiang. They had a total of six bottles. The monks in the temple abide by their commandment and do not drink, so they gave me one bottle as a present. After enjoying half of the bottle myself, I begrudged drinking any more of it. Brother Feng, I

have several more great wines at my place. I'd really like you to come over and judge them for me. What do you say?"

Linghu Chong was already feeling great intimacy toward the "Four Playfellows of Jiangnan," now with the prospect of tasting some great wine in addition, he found himself all jubilant. Turning his head over, he looked at Xiang Wentian for his reaction.

"Brother Feng, Fourth Master wants to invite you for some wine. You go ahead. As for me, since Third Master and Fourth Master gets grouchy when they see me, I think I'd better...um, well," Xiang Wentian said.

"Who said I get grouchy when I see you? Let's go. All of us! You are Brother Feng's friend, and you are invited too!" Mr. Paint smiled.

Before Xiang Wentian had any chance to decline, Mr. Paint had already coiled his left arm around Xiang Wentian's right arm and his right arm around Linghu Chong's left arm and began walking. "Come on! Come on! Let's have some more drinks!" he insisted, beaming brightly.

"When we bid our farewell to the Manor Masters earlier, Fourth Master showed a very unfriendly attitude toward Big Brother Xiang. Why has he turned so intimate all of a sudden? Is it possible that he simply couldn't forget the painting in the package on Big Brother Xiang's back for a moment and decided to fetch it using some other ways?" Linghu Chong thought to himself.

Soon, the three of them returned to the gate of the Plum Manor, at which Mr. Bald-Brush had been waiting for them.

"Brother Feng is back! Excellent! Excellent!" Mr. Bald-Brush uttered.

The four of them returned to the Game Room where Mr. Paint brought out many kinds of great wine and had a good drink with Linghu Chong. But Mr. Black-White never showed his face all the while.

The time was getting late now. It seemed as though Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint was waiting for someone, since both

of them kept glancing toward the entrance from the corner of their eyes. Xiang Wentian took leave of them several times, but the two hosts repeatedly urged him to stay. Linghu Chong, on the other hand, paid no attention to it and kept drinking his wine.

"If two Manor Masters do not invite us for dinner, I'll starve to death!" Xiang Wentian checked the color of the sky and then complained with a big grin.

"Right! Right!" Mr. Bald-Brush replied and then called out loudly, "Steward Ding, arrange the banquet! Hurry!"

Ding Jian acknowledged from outside when suddenly, the door was pushed open and Mr. Black-White stepped into the room.

"Brother Feng, there is another one in our manor who would like to have a sword contest with you," he said to Linghu Chong.

As soon as Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint heard these words, they jumped back onto their feet in unison, beaming with joy. "Big Brother has agreed!"

"So First Master had to give his permission before that person can have a sword contest with me," Linghu Chong thought inwardly. "It seems that they had kept me here so the Second Master could talk it over with the First Master. And only after a long plead did the First Master finally consent. Then this person must be either a junior in First Master's family or his disciple or underling of some sort. Is this person's sword skill really even better than that of the First Master?" Suddenly another thought popped into his brain and he groaned inwardly, "Oh no! They knew that I have lost all my inner strength. In consideration of their own status, they feel unbecoming doing it themselves. But if they send a junior or an subordinate to fight me and specially challenge me in the department of inner strength, it would take him no time to finish me off!" But then he thought, "These four Manor Masters are all fair champions. How could they commit such despicable act? But Third Master and



Fourth Master are simply crazy about that painting and that calligraphy book, and although the Second Master looked calm from the outside, he would certainly not rest contented until he gets his hands on those game manuals. Well, using such a bad method for the sake of those painting, calligraphy book, and game manuals is still well within the logic. If anyone really wants to injure me using inner strength, I'll just stab his joints or some crucial key points on his body first."

"Young Hero Feng, May I trouble you with another short trip?" Mr. Black-White asked.

"In regard to genuine Kung Fu skills, I am really no match for Third Master or Fourth Master, much less Second Master and First Master. The four senior masters of the Plum Manor of the Lone Hill all have unsurpassed Kung Fu skills. Only because of the congeniality you felt with me, you have been very tolerant and considerate. It is really needless for me to show my immature and shallow skills again," Linghu Chong declined.

"Brother Feng, of course that person's Kung Fu is higher than yours. But you don't need to be afraid. He..." Mr. Paint said, which was promptly cut off by Mr. Black-White.

"In our humble manor, there is yet another grandmaster who is an expert at the art of sword. Once he heard about Young Hero Feng's brilliant sword skills, he longed for a sword contest. I hope Young Hero Feng wouldn't mind having just one more match."

Afraid that he might be forced into injuring his opponent in the additional match and thus have a fall out with the "Four Playfellows of Jiangnan," Linghu Chong said, "Four Masters have been very kind to me. If I have this additional match, I wonder what kind of temper this grandmaster might have. If, for any reason, this ends in discord, or maybe I get injured from this grandmaster's sword, that would, for sure, hurt the friendly feelings."

"No worries! He won't...won't..." Mr. Paint tried to comfort him, but again, Mr. Black-White didn't let him finish.

"No matter what happens, the four of us will never blame you, Young Hero Feng," Mr. Black-White assured him.

"Fine! You might as well have another match," Xiang Wentian said. "But I have some things I need to take care right away and can't stay any longer. Brother Feng, I'll see you again in the city of Jiaxing."

"Are you leaving already? You can't leave yet!" Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint cried out in unison.

"Unless you leave Zhang Xu's calligraphy book behind," Mr. Bald-Brush demanded.

"If you leave now, where are we going to find you to get your painting, calligraphy book, and game manuals after Young Hero Feng loses the match? No, no, you'll have to stay just a little bit longer. Steward Ding, hurry up with the banquet!" Mr. Paint shouted.

"Young Hero Feng, I'll go with you. Brother Tong, please have something to eat. We'll be right back to accompany you. It won't take very long," Mr. Black-White said.

But Xiang Wentian shook his head again and again. "You are after a sure triumph with this match. Although my Brother Feng has excellent mastery in the art of the sword, his experience in confrontations is still very shallow. Besides, you have already found out that he has lost all his inner strength. Without me guarding onsite, even if we lose this match, we would not be reconciled to the defeat."

"What is Brother Tong saying here? Do you really think that we would cheat in the match?" Mr. Black-White asked.

"The four Masters of the Plum Manor of the Lone Hill are all people of exceptional virtues. I've always held the four masters in great reverence and, of course, have faith in you. But Brother Feng is having the sword match with someone else. I really had no idea that there's actually another grandmaster in the Plum Manor besides the four Manor Masters. May I ask Second Master here who is this person? If I know that this person is an honest had straightforward

champion just like the four Manor Masters, then I'll feel much more at ease," Xiang Wentian said.

"The Kung Fu skills and the fame of this person are only higher than the four brothers of us. There is simply no comparison between him and us," Mr. Paint said.

"In the Marital World, there are only a few people whose fame could be in comparison with that of the four Manor Masters. Then I am sure I must have heard of his name before," Xiang Wentian said.

"But we can't tell you his name," Mr. Bald-Brush answered.

"Then I must guard onsite during this match. Otherwise we can just forget about the match," Xiang Wentian insisted.

"Brother Tong, why are you so stubborn? It's not gonna do you any good coming to this match. This person has lived in seclusion for a long time and would rather not let any other people see his face," Mr. Paint explained.

"How does Brother Feng have the sword contest with him, then?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"Each side will be wearing a mask, exposing only the eyes. That way, neither could see the other," Mr. Black-White clarified.

"Will the Four Manor Masters be wearing masks as well?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"That's correct. This person has very eccentric tempers. If we don't, he would not fight," Mr. Black-White affirmed.

"I'll just wear a mask as well," Xiang Wentian persisted.

After a long hesitation, Mr. Black-White finally said, "If Brother Tong is determined to watch the match onsite, I suppose we have no choice. But Brother Tong must make a promise that you'll not make any sound through out the match."

"Pretending to be deaf and dumb, that's easy!" Xiang Wentian grinned.

So Mr. Black-White lead the way in the front, Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong followed in the middle and Mr.

Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint followed behind. Linghu Chong couldn't help but notice that they were actually following the same path that led to First Master's house earlier. Soon, they arrived outside of First Master's Zither Hall. After three gentle knocks on the door, Mr. Black-White pushed the door open and stepped in. A man already stood in the middle of the room, a mask made of black cloth covered his head. Linghu Chong easily recognized him as Mr. Huang-Zhong from his clothing. Mr. Black-White walked next to him and then whispered some words in his ears. Then Mr. Huang-Zhong shook his head and whispered some words back, obviously unwilling to let Xiang Wentian participate. Mr. Black-White gave a nod and then turned to the group behind him.

"My Big Brother thinks that the sword match is only a small matter. But if we provoke that friend in any way, there will be much unnecessary trouble. Let's call the match off."

The five of them bowed to Mr. Huang-Zhong and then went out of the room.

"Brother Tong, you are really an oddball, you know that?" Mr. Paint said irritably. "Did you think that we would just all swarm forward and bully Brother Feng? Well, your insisting on looking on the match has really cost us the match. Thank you for ruining the day for us!"

"It took Second Brother a great effort to convince Big Brother and get his permission. You'd rather make more trouble," Mr. Bald-Brush grunted.

"All right! All right! I'll yield a step. I won't insist on watching this match. But you have to promise that it's going to be a fair match and you won't deceive my Brother Feng," Xiang Wentian said with a grin.

"What kind of people did you think we were? We'd never deceive Young Hero Feng!" Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint cried out with joy in unison.

"I'll wait for you guys in the Game Room," Xiang Wentian said, smiling. "Brother Feng, I don't know what kind of

clandestine tricks they are trying to pull here. You'd better keep a weather eye open all the time and be very careful."

"The Plum Manor only has gentlemen with lofty virtues. How can there be anyone resorting to trickery and swindle?" Linghu Chong replied with a smile.

"Right on! Young Hero Feng is not like you, who measure others' corn by one's own bushel." Mr. Paint showed a broad grin.

Xiang Wentian took a few steps and then turned around and waved at Linghu Chong. "Brother Feng, come over here. I'd better exhort you some more so you wouldn't fall for other's tricks," he said, at which Mr. Paint sneered but paid no attention.

"Big Brother Xiang is being too careful. I am not a three-year-old kid. Even if they really plan on fooling me, it's not gonna be easy," Linghu Chong thought to himself as he walked toward Xiang Wentian.

Xiang Wentian grabbed hold of Linghu Chong's hand, and immediately Linghu Chong felt a paper ball placed in his palm. A quick squeeze told Linghu Chong that there was a piece of hard object wrapped inside the paper ball. With a broad smile, Xiang Wentian pulled him closer and then whispered to his ears.

"After you see that person, shake his hands to show your proximity, and then secretly place this paper ball together with the object inside into his palm. This is a very important matter. Don't take it lightly. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!"

When he said these words, the tone of his voice was very solemn, but he kept the broad smile on his face. The laughter at the end simply had nothing to do with his words. Mr. Black-White, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint all presumed that he must have been ridiculing the three of them.

"What's so funny? Young Hero Feng, no doubt, has excellent sword skills, but we haven't had a chance to check out the sword skills of Brother Tong," Mr. Paint challenged.

"My sword skills are most ordinary. There's no need to check it out," Xiang Wentian laughed out before waddling out of the room.

"Great! Let's go see Big Brother again," Mr. Paint said merrily.

The four of them entered Mr. Huang-Zhong's Zither Hall once again. Mr. Huang Zhong did not expect their return and had already removed the mask from his head.

"Big Brother, we have finally convinced that Brother Tong. He has agreed to not watch the match," Mr. Black-White said.

"Good," Mr. Huang-Zhong replied. Picking up the black cloth mask, he put it back onto his head.

Mr. Paint pulled out a drawer from the wooden cabinet and took out three black cloth masks. He handed one of them to Linghu Chong and said, "This one is mine. You can wear it. Big Brother, I am borrowing your pillowcase."

He went inside the bedroom and soon returned with a green cloth pillowcase over his head. Two holes had been cut off the pillowcase, showing his two eyes.

Mr. Huang-Zhong nodded his approval and then said to Linghu Chong, "When you have the sword context later, both of you will be using wooden swords in case inner strength is used is used and put Brother Feng into disadvantage."

"That would be great!" Linghu Chong said happily.

"Second Brother, bring two wooden swords," Mr. Huang-Zhong said to Mr. Black-White, who, in turn, pulled another drawer from the cabinet and took out two wooden swords.

"Brother Feng, regardless of who wins this contest, will you please not mention a word to anyone else?" Mr. Huang-Zhong said to Linghu Chong.

"That's of course! I've said before that I didn't come to the Plum Manor to make a name for myself. Why would I want to go out and make it widely known? Besides, there's a high probability that I'll be losing this match. What's there to brag about?" Linghu Chong answered.

"Well, that's not necessarily a sure thing, but I believe Brother Feng is a man of his words and won't let the word out. Will you please also not mention a word about anything you see afterwards, not even to that Brother Tong? Do you think you can do that?" Mr. Huang-Zhong asked.

"Not even Big Brother Tong? After the sword contest, naturally he would ask me about the entire course. If I keep my mouth completely shut, isn't it rather harsh for our friendship?" Linghu Chong hesitated.

"That Brother Tong is a worldly-wise man. Once he is made aware that Brother Feng has made a promise to me, he would understand that a true man's promise is worth one thousand gold and you must make good your promise, then naturally he won't force you to tell against your will," Mr. Huang-Zhong said.

"That's true. I promise you," Linghu Chong agreed.

Mr. Huang-Zhong cupped his hands together. "Thank you for your understanding, Brother Feng! Let's go."

Turning on his heels, Linghu Chong began walking toward the outside. So when Mr. Paint pointed toward the bedroom and said, "This way," Linghu Chong was completely taken by surprise. "How come we are going into the bedroom?" he thought, but then he immediately came up with an answer, "Oh, I see. The person who will have the sword contest with me is a woman. Maybe she is First Master's wife or a female relative. That's why they insisted on not having Big Brother Xiang watching the match by the side. They don't want her to see my face and don't want me to see her face, either, all because males and females should be distinguished. And First Master urged me again and again to not mention a word to anybody else, not even to Big Brother Xiang. If it weren't because it had something to do with a female, why would they be so serious?"

Once he figured this part out, all his suspicions suddenly cleared away, then when he felt the paper ball and the small hard object inside in his palm, he thought inwardly, "It looks

as though all Big Brother Xiang's careful and shrewd arrangement only are for one purpose: to enable him to pay a visit to that woman. Since he couldn't see her himself, he entrusted me to pass a letter and a keepsake to her. Then there must have been some kind of an obscure affair between them. Even though Big Brother Xiang is my sworn-brother, the four Manor Masters have also been very kind to me. If I pass these along, it would really be unfair to the four Manor Masters. What should I do?" Then he thought, "Big Brother Xiang and the four Manor Masters are all people well above their fifties or sixties. That woman must have not been young, either. Even if there was intertwined love relationship involved here, it had to be a past thing many years ago. I suppose passing this letter along wouldn't damage the woman's chastity."

While he was muttering to himself, the five of them had entered the inner bedroom. The arrangement in the room was very simply, with only a bed and a small table. The gauze bed-curtain hung above the bed appeared antiquated and showed slight yellow. On top of the small table sat a short zither, completely black as though it was made of iron.

"Everything panned out as Big Brother Xiang planned. Alas, his love is so deep, how can I not help him fulfill this wish?" Linghu Chong thought.

He always had a carefree disposition and never cared much about the Confucian code of etiquette. At the moment, he vaguely felt as though that woman had turned into his little apprentice sister, Yue Lingshan, who had married her junior apprentice brother Lin Pingzhi, and he was Xiang Wentian, who was trying every possible way to pay another visit to little apprentice sister after several decades. When a meeting turned out to be impossible, he then tried to pass along a keepsake from the old days to merely express his feelings and slightly relieve the decades of lovesickness.

"Maybe it was also because of this old lover of his, Big Brother Xiang broke away from the Demon's Cult and didn't



hesitate to have a complete fall out with the Chief and his fellow members in the cult," Linghu Chong thought.

Amid his reverie, Mr. Huang-Zhong had already lifted the beddings on the bed, removed the bed board off the bed, exposing an iron plate with a copper ring attached to the top of it. With a tight grip at the copper ring, Mr. Huang-Zhong pulled upward, and a four-foot wide and five-foot long iron board rose up slowly, revealing a large rectangular-shaped opening. The iron plate was at least half-a-foot thick and appeared to be extremely heavy.

After placing the iron plate on the floor, Mr. Huang-Zhong said to Linghu Chong, "This person's residence is kind of strange. Brother Feng, please follow me." At those words, he jumped into the opening.

"After you, Young Hero Feng," Mr. Black-White urged.

Very surprised, Linghu Chong followed suit and also jumped into the opening. What he saw next was an oil lamp hanging from a wall, which illuminated the surroundings indistinctly. Where he stood now seemed to be the beginning of a tunnel. Following behind Mr. Huang-Zhong he walked forward, and soon Mr. Black-White and the rest of the people also jumped down one after another.

About twenty feet following the passageway, the tunnel seemed to have come to an end. Mr. Huang-Zhong took out a string of keys from his chest pocket and inserted one of them into a keyhole. Turning the key several times, he pushed forward; amid a series of scrunches, a stone gate slowly opened up.

Linghu Chong found himself more and more astounded, and at the meantime, felt more and more sympathy toward Xiang Wentian. "They have locked the woman up in a dungeon, then of course she was imprisoned against her will. These four Manor Masters all appeared to be man of kindheartedness and justice; how could they have committed such a contemptible deed?" he pondered.

He followed Mr. Huang-Zhong and entered the stone gate. The tunnel began to descend as the passageway extended in front them. After several hundred feet, another gate appeared in front of them, this time, an iron-gate. Taking the string of keys out once again, Mr. Hung-Zhong opened the iron-gate.

The tunnel kept descending deeper and deeper under the ground. By then they were probably over one thousand feet below the surface. The tunnel made a few turns when another gate met Linghu Chong's eyes.

"I had thought that since the four Manor Masters are adept at music, gamesmanship, calligraphy, and painting, the 'Four Arts', they must have been persons of lofty virtues and poetic temperament. Who would have thought that they would set up private prisons and imprison a woman in such a hellhole that's completely void of daylight and sunshine?" Linghu Chong felt resentment brewing inside his chest.

When he first entered the tunnel, he had no intention to watch out for the four Manor Masters, but at the moment he simply couldn't help feeling his vigilance growing considerably. "They couldn't defeat me in sword tests. Could it be possible that they have lured me down here so they could imprison me here? There are gates after gates inside the tunnel, no one would be able to escape even if he was furnished with wings." That thought almost made him shudder. But with Mr. Huang-Zhong in front of him, Mr. Black-White, Mr. Bald-Brush, and Mr. Paint behind, and not a single weapon in his hands, he found himself quite helpless.

The third gateway actually consisted of four separate doors. Behind the iron door was a wooden door covered with cotton wadding nailed onto the door plank. Behind the wooden door stood another iron door, behind which was another wooden door covered with cotton wadding.

"Why have they placed two wooden doors covered with cotton wadding in between the two iron doors?" Linghu Chong wondered. "I got it. I suppose the prisoner has very

formidable inner strength. The cotton wadding was used to absorb the fierce power from her palm and prevent her from breaking down the iron doors."

For the next one hundred feet or so, there were no more gates along the way. The oil lamps hung from the tunnel wall stood further and further from each other. In some sections of the tunnel, the oil lamps had long extinguished, leaving only complete darkness, and the pack had to feel their way forward for dozens of feet before seeing the next light.

The further they went, the harder it was to breathe, Linghu Chong found. Moreover, the tunnel wall and the tunnel floor had turned awfully damp. Suddenly, a thought came to his attention, "The Plum Manor sits on the bank of the West Lake. After walking for so long, we are probably deep underneath the West Lake by now. This person is locked up underneath the West Lake, not only is it impossible for her to escape by herself, it is also impossible for others to rescue her, because as soon as they dig open the tunnel wall, water from the lake would have poured in from above."

After another thirty or forty feet forward, the tunnel suddenly turned very narrow, and they had to bend their backs to proceed forward. The further they went, the lower they had to bend their backs. Another twenty feet later, Mr. Huang-Zhong finally held his steps and took out his flint to light up the oil lamp on the tunnel wall. Before long another iron-door came into view under the dim light, an iron-door with a square-shaped opening one-foot wide.

"Mr. Ren, Huang-Zhong and his brothers have come to visit you!" Mr. Huang-Zhong spoke toward the square-shaped opening, loud and clear.

"What? How could it be Mr. Ren? Shouldn't the person locked inside a female?" Linghu Chong was taken aback.

But no response came from the inside.

"Mr. Ren, we are very regretful for not having sent our respects to you often. We have come today to inform you of an important matter," Mr. Huang-Zhong spoke again.

Suddenly a hoarse voice bellowed from inside the cell, "Important matter my ass! If you've got horseshit, unload it now! If not, get the hell out of here!"

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. Instantly, all his previous fancy disappeared like mist and smoke. Not only did the voice belong to an old man, the words this man used were also so crude that they had to come from the mouth of a street vulgar.

"Before, we had always thought that when talking about exceptional sword masters of our time, Mr. Ren would undoubtedly be ranked as the number one on the chart. But how wrong we were! Today we had a visitor to the Plum Manor. The four brothers of us certainly were no match for him; even Mr. Ren's sword art would pale into insignificance by comparison," Mr. Huang-Zhong said.

"He is using mocking words to goad that man into entering a sword context with me," Linghu Chong thought to himself.

The man burst into loud laughter. "You four sons of bitches couldn't beat him, so you goaded him into sparring with me and hoped that I would take care of this tough enemy for you, didn't you, you scumbags? Ha-ha, what wishful thinking! Too bad that I haven't touched a sword for over ten years and have completely forgotten all my sword skills. Why don't you just put your tail between your legs and get the hell out of here, you bloody bastards!"

Linghu Chong gasped with astonishment. "This man is so incredibly sharp-witted and could predict with miraculous accuracy. Just from Mr. Huang-Zhong's words he had figured everything out," he thought to himself.

"Big Brother, in no way would Mr. Ren be this person's rival. This person said that nobody in the Plum Manor could defeat him, and he wasn't overstating the case. There's no need to talk further with Mr. Ren," Mr. Bald-Brush said.

"Give it up! Provoking me won't cut it. Did you actually think I would do anything for you four bastards?" the man

named Ren snarled.

"This person has truly mastered the sword skills taught by the venerable Grandmaster Feng Qingyang of the Huashan Sword School. Big Brother, I heard that years ago when Mr. Ren roamed the Martial World, he feared neither Heaven nor Earth, except one person – Grandmaster Feng. Mr. Ren's nickname was something like 'Flee at the Sight of the Wind', and the word 'wind' here refers to the venerable Grandmaster Feng Qingyang.<sup>88</sup> Is that true?" Mr. Bald-Brush asked.

"What stinking fart! Rubbish!" the man named Ren roared at these words.

"Third Brother said it wrong," Mr. Paint joined in.

"Why?" Mr. Bald-Brush asked.

"You got one word wrong," Mr. Paint elaborated. "Mr. Ren's nickname is not 'Flee at the Sight of the Wind'. It is 'Flee at the Sound of the Wind.' Now think about it. If Mr. Ren had already had Grandmaster Feng in his sight, the two of them couldn't have been very far from each other, and how could Grandmaster Feng have allowed him to get away? Only that as soon as he heard Grandmaster Feng's name mentioned he starts running right away, restless like a cur stray from his pack...."

"...and hasten like a fish slipping out of the net...," Mr. Bald-Brush added.

"...is he able to keep his head on his neck all the way till today!" Mr. Paint completed the sentence.

The man named Ren seemed to be quite amused by these words and laughed out loud. "You four stinking bastards found yourself driven from pillar to post by him, and then thought that you could beg me to take him on. Go jump in the lake. Did you think I am so stupid to fall for your tricks?"

Mr. Huang-Zhong heaved a sigh. "Brother Feng," he said to Linghu Chong, "this Mr. Ren here is already frightened out of his wits simply at the mentioning of the 'Feng' in your

name. There's no need for another sword match. We'll just admit that you are the number one sword master in the entire world."

Although Linghu Chong knew that he had imagined everything wrong when he found out that the person was not a woman, seeing him stuck in the dungeon, and obviously for a very long time, the feeling of sympathy soared in his heart spontaneously. From the tone of everybody, he deduced that this person had to be a very senior master with extraordinary Kung Fu skills. So when he heard Mr. Huang-Zhong's words, he objected.

"First Master, it is not true. When Grandmaster Feng discussed sword arts with me, he held this...this venerable Mr. Ren in very high esteem. He said that in regard to sword masters of our time, the revered Mr. Ren was the only person he had admiration for and that if I were lucky to meet this Mr. Ren someday, I must kowtow to him with utter respect and ask for his advice with sincere desire."

These words sent Mr. Huang-Zhong and his sworn brothers in complete shock while that Mr. Ren found himself on the high ropes. Laughing loudly, he said, "Little friend, what you said is very correct. Feng Qingyang is no ordinary swordsman. He, and only he, is capable of recognizing the subtlety of my sword arts."

"Grand...Grandmaster Feng knows that he...he is here?" Mr. Huang-Zhong uttered. His voice quivered and Linghu Chong almost felt he sensed dread in his voice.

"Grandmaster Feng thought that the revered Mr. Ren had retired to a scenery spot in a famous mountain," Linghu Chong decided to run wild with his made-up story. "During the time when he trained me in the art of sword, he had frequently mentioned about the revered Mr. Ren. He said that the only purpose of training in these sword moves was to fight revered Mr. Ren's students. If revered Mr. Ren never existed, then it would have become completely unnecessary to learn these very complicated sword moves."

By then he had become very discontented with the four Masters of the Plum Manor, thinking that the man named Ren must have been a champion of the past, and his captivity in the dark and degrading prison must have resulted from some sort of a despicable plot in secret set up by the four Manor Masters, so even his words carried much ridicule and sarcasm.

“Um, that’s right, my little friend! Feng Qingyang really has some good insights. You got the better of these folks in the Plum Manor, didn’t you?” The man named Ren asked.

“Well, since my sword skills were taught my Grandmaster Feng, himself, then unless it was you, Mr. Ren, or unless it was a student of yours, ordinary people of course wouldn’t stand a chance,” Linghu Chong replied.

By saying these words, he had publicly denounced Mr. Huang-Zhong and the bunch. The more he felt how dark, damp, and gloomy the dungeon was, the angrier he was at the four Manor Masters. He had only stayed here for a very short while and was already feeling awfully uncomfortable, but they had locked this senior master in this appalling place, a place completely unsuitable for human inhabitation, for god knows how many years. That was just atrocious. As the moral indignation grew rapidly inside him, he had no more scruple with the choice of his words, thinking that even if worst came to worst and they killed him on the spot, he wouldn’t have cared any more.

When Mr. Huang-Zhong and the rest Manor Masters heard these words, they of course felt much snubbed. But they did lose their matches and had nothing to contradict.

“Brother Feng, what are you...?” Mr. Paint muttered, but after Mr. Black-White gave his sleeve a tug, he held his tongue.

“Very good! Very good! Little friend, you’ve really given me a vent to my anger. Now tell me, how did you beat them?” the man asked.

“The first person from the Plum Manor to have sword match with me was a friend named Ding Jian with a nickname called something like ‘Straight Line Lightning Sword’,” Linghu Chong said.

“His sword moves are flash and without substance. He doesn’t have any true skills, and all he does is to try to scare people with his sword flashes. You don’t have to use any move sparring him. Just place your blade there and he’ll send his fingers, wrists, or arms onto your blade and have them cut off, himself,” the man said.

Feeling utterly astounded, the five listeners cried out in unison.

“What? Was I not right?” the man asked.

“You are absolutely right. It’s almost like you have seen it with your own eyes,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Great! Then did he cut off his five fingers or a hand?”

“I turned my sword blade a little bit,” Linghu Chong said.

“Wrong! Wrong! Why be so nice to your enemy? You are too kindhearted and one day you’ll for sure get the worse of it. So who was your second opponent?”

“It was Fourth Master.”

“Um, Fourth’s sword skills of course are better than that ‘Straight Line Fart Sword’, but not by much. After he saw you defeat Ding Jian, I bet that he’d be using that unique stun of his, which he prided himself on. Ah, what was that sword art called? Oh, yeah. It’s called the ‘Splashing Ink Slicing Hemp Sword Art’, with something like ‘White Aurora Shooting the Sun,’ or ‘Mounting Flood-Dragon and the Soaring Phoenix’, or something like ‘Willow Wickers Fluttering in the Spring Breeze’.”

Hearing that the man was able to spell out his prided sword moves with such accuracy, Mr. Paint found himself in an even bigger shock.

“Fourth Master’s sword art was actually quite clever, except that it has too many flaws when he attacks,” Linghu Chong said.



“Ha-ha, Old Feng’s student certainly has a few tricks of the trade. You hit the mark with a single comment and have identified the deadly flaw in this ‘Splashing Ink Splitting Hemp Sword Art’ of his. Within this sword art of his, there’s one move, which he always thought to be the most formidable killer move in the entire sword art, called ‘Jade Dragon Hanging Upside Down’ where he would bring the sword swishing down from above with shear force. If he indeed launched this move against a student of Old Feng, then all the opponent had to do was to slice the long sword upward right next to his sword blade, and all his five fingers would have been sliced off, and the blood from his hand would splash everywhere like splashing ink. It’s called the ‘Splashing Blood Slicing Fingers Sword Art’! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!”

“Senior Master can predict with miraculous accuracy. I did defeat him on this move exactly as Senior Master has described. But I have no grudges against him; besides, Fourth Master had feasted me with great wines and treated me very kindly. So in regard to the five fingers, there’s no need to slice them off. Ha-ha! Ha-ha!” Linghu Chong said.

By then, Mr. Paint’s face looked as though someone had painted it scarlet and violet, and he was well worthy of the name “Mr. Paint”. Except that his head is covered by a pillowcase, so no one could actually see his face.

“Bald-headed Third uses a Judge’s Pen. His handwriting is no better than a three-year-old kid, yet he loves posing as a lover of culture and even claims that his Kung Fu contains conception from famous calligraphers. Little friend, I am sure you understand that combat with your enemy is an important matter that distinguishes between life and death. Even if one wrestles with all his strength, he is not guaranteed a triumph, where would he find such leisurely and carefree mood to be particular about the style of the inscription or script? Only when your opponent’s Kung Fu is far inferior to that or yours, you might be able to tease him or play him, but if the two sides’ Kung Fu skills are comparable

and you still try to write words with your Judge's Pen, you are only offering your own life with both hands to the mercy of your enemy."

"Senior Masters' words are very precise. The Third Master is a bit too casual when he fights others," Linghu Chong agreed.

When Mr. Bald-Brush first heard the man's comments, he was furious. But the more he thought about these words, the more he found them to be in the right. It was a lot of fun when he permeated calligraphy in his Judge Pen moves, but the power from his weapon did decrease dramatically after all. If it weren't because Linghu Chong held back, even ten Mr. Bald-Brush would have been slain easily. At that thought, he broke into cold sweat.

"To beat Bald-headed Third is as easy as a walkover," the man said with a laugh. "His Judge Pen Kung Fu used to be quite worthy, but he is too bigheaded and would rather add some kind of calligraphy in his Kung Fu. Humph, when elite fighters exchange moves, the outcome is determined from very minor aspects. Treating his own life as a joking matter, it is really a miracle in the Martial World that he was able to stay alive till today. Bald-headed Third, for the last ten years you just holed up and didn't go around the Martial world, didn't you?"

Mr. Bald-Brush let out a snort but didn't answer, when, in fact, a chill just shot down his spine. "He is absolutely right. If I had been wandering in the Martial World in the last ten years, there's no way I'd still be alive today," he thought inwardly.

"Second's Kung Fu with his Magnetic Iron Game Board is genuine talent, though," the man continued. "Once he starts his attack, each move becomes faster than the previous one, and the attack would swamp his opponent like a gust of blizzard or a sudden downpour. It is indeed not easy to withstand for ordinary martial artists. Little friend, tell me how you broke his attack?"

“Well, I certainly dare not to use the word ‘break’ here. Only that as soon as the fight broke out, I initiated my attack as well as the Second Master and was able to force him into defense,” Linghu Chong replied.

“Excellent! How about the second move?” the man asked.

“With the second move, I used a forestall attack again, and Second Master took a defending stance again.”

“Excellent! Then how about the third move?”

“With the third move I was still attacking and he was still defending.”

“Incredible! In the old times, Black-White was indeed awe-inspiring in the Martial World. By then he used a regular Iron Board, and if anyone could withstand his three consecutive strikes, Black-White would spare his life. Later he changed his weapon to the Magnetic Iron Game Board and gained great advantage in his weapon, consequently, became even more capable. Little friend, you were actually able to force him into three consecutive defending moves, that’s excellent! So on the fourth move, how did he counterattack?”

On the fourth move, again, I attacked and Second Master defended.”

“Is Old Feng’s sword art really this brilliant? Even though to defeat Black-White is not difficult, you were actually able to force him into a defending stance again on the fourth move? Hmm, excellent! Excellent! On the fifth move, it must have been him who attacked?”

“On the fifth move, the situation remained the same.”

“Oh!” the man named Ren fell silent. Only after a long pause did he speak again. “After how many of your attacking moves Black-White was able to counterattack?”

“Um...well...I don’t remember how many,” Linghu Chong answered.

Mr. Black-White picked it up and said, “Senior Master, Young Hero Feng’s sword skills are so brilliant that from the

beginning all the way to the end, I was not able to attack even once. After over forty moves, I knew I was no match for him so I stopped the match and admitted my defeat.” Only by then did he speak to the man named Ren and the tone of his words was unexpectedly respectful.

“Ah!” the man cried out loudly. “This is ridiculous! Although Feng Qingyang is an exceptional talent in the Sword Branch of the Huashan Sword School, Huashan Sword Branch’s sword art still has its limit. I’d never believe that someone from the Huashan School can attack Black-White with over forty moves and not let him return even a single blow!”

“Revered Mr. Ren is really flattering me, a junior! This Brother Feng here has well surpassed his teacher. The level of his sword skills has far exceeded the extent of Huashan Sword Branch. When we look around the entire Martial World, only someone like the Revered Mr. Ren, someone to be considered the mightiest fighter of our time, is capable of giving him some pointers,” Mr. Black-White said.

“Mr. Huang-Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush, and Mr. Paint all sounded very rude while Mr. Black-White spoke with the utmost esteem. But whether they were provoking words or flattering words, their intention remained the same, that is to let this Mr. Ren have a sword contest with me,” Linghu Chong thought to himself.

“Humph! Your fawning stinks just the same!” the man reprimanded. “Huang-Zhong’s moves and techniques are only on par with that of Black-White’s, but his cultivation in inner strength is not bad at all. Little friend, is your inner strength stronger than him, too?”

“I had incurred prior injuries and had lost all my inner strength, that was why First Master’s ‘Seven-String Invisible Sword’ had no effect on me at all,” Linghu Chong replied.

The man burst into loud laughter. “That is very interesting. Little friend, I think I’d like to check out your sword art,” he said.

“Senior Master, please don’t fall for their scheme. The Four Playfellows of Jiangnan want to goad you into having the sword match. But they actually have ulterior motives,” Linghu Chong urged.

“What ulterior motives?” the man asked.

“They made a wager with a friend of mine that if any one in the Plum Manor can defeat my sword art, then that friend of mine would have to lose a few things to them,” Linghu Chong explained.

“Lose a few things? Um, I suppose they must be rare music scores, game manuals, or probably authentic calligraphy books or paintings from ancient times,” the man said.

“Senior Master can foresee with divine accuracy!” Linghu Chong said.

“I only want to see your sword art; we are not having a real fight. Besides, who said I’d be able to beat you for sure?”

“It’s practically certain that Senior Master would prevail over me. But we must ask the four Manor Masters to give their words on one condition,” Linghu Chong said.

“What condition?” the man asked.

“If Senior Masters defeats the long sword in my hand and win those several treasures for them, the four Manor Masters must open the cell door and let Senior Master leave this place,” Linghu Chong explained.

“Little friend has a very fantastic idea. Did Feng Qingyang teach you that?” the man grinned.

“Venerable Grandmaster Feng has no idea that Senior Master is imprisoned here. And I had absolutely no clue about it as well,” Linghu Chong said.

“Young Hero Feng,” Mr. Black-White suddenly called out. “What is the name of this Revered Mr. Ren? What nickname has he gained from fellow martial masters in the Martial World? Which school was he the Head Master of? Why is he locked up here? Did the Venerable Grandmaster Feng tell you anything about it?”

Facing these four sudden questions from Mr. Black-White, Linghu Chong found himself tongue-tied. Before when Linghu Chong had attacked forty or so moves in quick successions, Mr. Black-White had been able to ward them off with forty or so defending moves. But now when Mr. Black-White suddenly asked him four questions in quick successions as though he was attacking with four moves, Linghu Chong couldn't even fend off any one of them. After some indistinct falters, he said, "Well, I haven't heard any of those from Grandmaster Feng. I...I really don't know the answers to those."

"Right! I bet you don't have a clue," Mr. Paint joined in. "If you had known the cause here, you wouldn't have wanted us to release him. If this man gets to leave this place, then the entire Martial World would have been turned upside down. Countless of people would die under his hands and there will never be another peaceful day in the entire Martial World."

"That's correct!" the man guffawed. "No matter how daring the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan are, they'd never have the guts to let me out of the prison cell. Besides, they are only following orders to watch over this place, nothing more than four puny prison guards. How could they have the authority to release me? Little friend, this request of yours has really elevated their status too much!"

Linghu Chong kept his silence, thinking, "I had the least bit of idea about any of these implications. No wonder only a few sentence into it, I've already given myself away."

"Brother Feng," Mr. Huang-Zhong said, "when you saw how gloomy and damp the dungeon is, naturally you sympathized with this Mr. Ren, therefore, felt resentment toward us four brothers. That only shows the errantry in your heart, and I don't blame you. But did you know that if this Mr. Ren returned to the Martial World, just in your Huashan School, at least half of your people would have been wiped out. Mr. Ren, am I correct on that?"

“You are correct! Is Huashan School’s Head Master still Yue Buqun? He is a complete hypocrite. Too bad at first I was too busy, and then fell for a secret plot afterwards, otherwise, I would have tore his hypocritical mask off a long time again,” the man scoffed.

Linghu Chong felt big shock in his heart. Though his Master expelled him from the Huashan School and also proclaimed to the entire world, making him the public enemy of all orthodox schools in the Martial World, he always recalled with emotion the kindness his Master and Master-Wife had shown him bringing him up and treating him like their own son. When he heard the man named Ren fouled and insulted his Master, he couldn’t help but roar, “Shut up! My Mas....” But he immediately swallowed the rest of the word down, remembering that when Xiang Wentian brought him to the Plum Manor, he had been introduced as the Uncle-Master of his Master. Before knowing whether these people were good or evil, it would have been unwise to reveal the truth.

The man named Ren, of course, did not know the true meaning behind Linghu Chong’s roar. While laughing loudly, he continued, “Within the Huashan School, there are of course people I think much of. Reverend Feng is one; you, little friend, is another. And there is another junior of yours called something like ‘Jade Maiden of Huashan’ Ning...Ning something. Oh, I got it. Her name is Ning Zhongze. That little girl is actually straightforward and heroic. She is a talent. What a pity it is that she had to marry that Yue Buqun like a beautiful flower stuck on a pile of cow dung.”

Linghu Chong didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry when he heard the man referring to his Master-Wife as a “little girl,” so he didn’t respond. At least he had favorable comment for Master-Wife and called her a talent.

“Little friend, what’s your name?” the man asked.

“My surname is Feng, and my first name is Er-Zhong,” Linghu Chong replied.

"Anyone with the surname Feng in the Huashan School can't be bad. Come in here. Let me check out Reverent Feng's sword art," the man said. He had been referring to Feng Qingyang as "Old Feng" at first, but then changed it to "Reverent Feng" later. He must have been quite pleased with the way Linghu Chong talked and turned courteous toward Feng Qingyang in his words.

Linghu Chong's curiosity had been growing constantly for a good while and was very eager to meet this man, to take a look at how he looked and to find out how great his Kung Fu was.

"My shallow sword art is only good for bluffing some people on the outside. But in front of Senior Master, it is nothing more than a laughing matter. But the Revered Mr. Ren is a man with exceptional abilities. Since I am already here, how can I not pay a visit?" he said respectfully.

Mr. Paint moved closer and then whispered to his ears, "Brother Feng, this man's Kung Fu is very bizarre, and the methods he employs are also very sinister. Be very careful. If anything doesn't feel right for you, come back out immediately." His voice was very low, but the caring and concern obviously came from complete sincerity.

"Fourth Master is treating me like a true friend!" Linghu Chong thought inwardly. "I ridiculed him with my words just a moment ago. Not only didn't he bear grudges at all, on the contrary, he sincerely cared for my safety." At that thought, secretly, he couldn't help but feel ashamed.

"Come in! Come in! What are they talking about on the outside, talking so furtively? Little friend, the Four Clowns of the Jiangnan are no good apples. All they want is to have you fall for their trick. Nothing good will come out of their mouths. Don't trust a word from them," the man said loudly.

Linghu Chong found himself wavering, not sure which side he should trust and which side he should help. Mr. Huang-Zhong took out another key from his chest pocket and then turned it several times after inserting it into the keyhole



on the iron-door. Linghu Chong had thought that after he unlocked the door, he would go ahead and push the iron-door open, but quite to his surprise, Mr. Huang-Zhong stepped back and Mr. Black-White stepped forward, who also took out a key from his own chest pocket, inserted the key into the keyhole, and then turned a few times. After him, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint each took out his key and turned the key in the keyhole respectively.

Linghu Chong suddenly realized, "This Senior Master's status must have been very prestigious. The four Manor Masters each is holding a separate key and it takes all four keys combined to be able to open the iron-door. The Four Playfellows of Jiangnan are as intimate as real brothers, and the four of them are almost like one unity. How come they don't even trust each other?" Then he thought, "A moment ago, that Senior Master said that the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan are only acting under orders like prison guards. They have no authority to release him at all. Maybe it was the same person who appointed them the guard duty who ordered them to each holds a separate key. The turning sounds of the keys were strident and unsmooth, obviously the lock was covered with rust and it has been a long time since the iron-door was last opened."

After Mr. Paint turned his key in the keyhole, he grasped onto the door handle, shook it a few times, and then pushed hard. Amid the loud scrunching sounds, the iron-door opened for a few inches inward. As soon as the door opened, Mr. Paint leapt backward. Mr. Huang-Zhong and the other two Manor Masters also leapt back many feet. Instinctively, Linghu Chong also took a few steps back.

"Little friend, they are afraid of me, but why would you be?" the man laughed loudly.

"Right!" Linghu Chong answered and then stepped forward. Reaching his hand out, he pushed on the iron-door. The hinges on the door were so rusted that he pushed very

hard and only was able to open the door two feet wide. Immediately, a strong stale smell filled his nostrils.

Mr. Paint stepped forward and then handed him two wooden swords. Linghu Chong took the wooden swords and held them tightly with his left hand.

"Brother Feng, take an oil lamp with you," Mr. Bald-Brush suggested, taking an oil lamp off the wall.

Linghu Chong took the oil lamp with his right hand and then entered the room. The prison cell was about ten-foot long and ten foot wide. A narrow and long bed lay next to a wall, on which sat a man. Long whiskers and mast aches covered the man's face, making it impossible to see his look. The long beard under his chin almost reached his waist. But his hair, beard, and eyebrows were jet black without even a grain of grey.

"It is so fortunate of me to be able to meet the Senior Master Ren today. I hope I'll be getting many good advice from you," Linghu Chong bowed.

"Don't be modest. I'll have to thank you for coming here to dispel my loneliness," the man grinned.

"You flatter me. Should I put the oil lamp on the bed?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Fine!" the man answered but didn't reach out to get the lamp.

"This prison cell is too small to have a sword fight here?" Linghu Chong thought to himself.

He walked next to the bed and set the oil lamp down. Expediently, he gently tucked the paper ball and the hard object inside into the man's palm. The man was slightly taken aback but still took the paper ball as he asked in a loud voice, "Hey, you four chaps! Are you coming in to watch?"

"The space is too limited. There's no room," Mr. Huang-Zhong replied.

"Suit yourself! Little friend, shut the door," " the man said.

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered and then shut the cell door.

The man stood up and immediately a series of slight clanking sounds clanged from around his body as though many thin steel chains were clanking against each other. Reaching out with his right hand, he took a wooden sword from Linghu Chong and heaved a long sigh.

"I have not touched a weapon for over ten years. I wonder if I still remember the sword arts I learned many years back."

Linghu Chong noticed a steel circle around his wrist, and a steel chain attached to it connected all the way to the wall behind him. Another glance quickly confirmed that there were also steel chains shackling the man's other hand and both of his ankles to the wall behind him. Then the four walls grabbed his attention. Under the dim light from the oil lamp, they shined in dark green – turned out the four walls were all made of pure steel. He figured that the chains and shackles on the man's wrists and ankles must have been made of pure steel, or else, chains this thin wouldn't have been able to restrain a top notch Kung Fu master like him.

The man gave the wood sword a swing. The swing came from above to below and the sword merely moved about two feet in the air, but suddenly loud buzzes echoed in the small room.

"Senior Master, what incredible strength!" Linghu Chong praised.

The man turned around, and Linghu Chong could vaguely see that he opened the paper ball, saw the hard object wrapped inside, and began reading the writings on the paper. Taking a step backward, Linghu Chong intentionally blocked the square hole on the iron-door with his head, so no one from the outside could see what the man was doing. The man's body trembled slightly as though the writings on the paper had greatly agitated him, and the steel chains clanged

again and again. But only moments later, he had already turned around, and sharp stares shot out of his eyes.

“Little friend, although my hands cannot move freely, it is not necessarily true that I cannot win over you!”

“As a young and green junior, I, of course, is no rival for Senior Master,” Linghu Chong said.

“You attacked Black-White over forty moves in succession and didn’t give him any chance to launch his counterattack. You want to give me try?” the man demanded.

“Please forgive my audacity!” Linghu Chong replied and then thrust his sword at that man. The move he used was none other than the exact same first move he had used in the match against Mr. Black-White.

“Excellent!” the man commended and thrust his wooden sword at Linghu Chong’s left chest at an angle. It was a defending move that carried strong offence, and an offence move backed by strong defense at the same time, a swift and fierce sword move indeed.

Mr. Black-White watched the fight through the square shaped hole on the iron-door. As soon as he saw this move, he couldn’t help but shout, “Brilliant move!”

“Today is you four chaps’ lucky day. I am going to really widen your view now,” the man chortled.

By then, Linghu Chong’s second sword attack had arrived. The man swung his wooden sword outward and pointed it at Linghu Chong’s right shoulder, another smart move that had both strong defense and strong offense. Linghu Chong’s heart thumped. It felt as though there was not a single flaw in the man’s move that he could explorer to thrust forward and attack the opponent’s vital points. Having no alternative, he leveled his own sword in a block, tilting his sword tip, implying a possible attack toward the opponent’s lower stomach, a defending move that also carried much offense.

“Very clever move!” the man smiled, retracting his sword and swept it to the side.

The two of them went back and forth, and within just a few moments had already exchanged twenty moves or so. But during the entire course, the two wooden swords never even touched each other. The man's sword moves had such complicated variations and movements; ever since Linghu Chong had learned the "Dugu Nine Swords," he had never run into an opponent so formidable and powerful. It wasn't that his opponent's sword moves were void of flaws, but because the moves fluctuated so unpredictably he simply couldn't attack the flaw or crack within. But he sincerely followed the gist in Feng Qingyang's teaching, which was to "conquer a move with no move," and shifted his moves at will. Although the "Sword-Breaking Stance" was only one stance in the "Dugu Nine Swords," it was a combination of the essentials in all the sword arts of various schools and factions in the world. So even though it was "no move," when in fact it built its foundation on all the moves in all sword arts.

The man also noticed that Linghu Chong's new sword moves emerged one after another, and every change seemed completed new to him. Relying on his abundant experience and profound Kung Fu skills, he was able to resolve them one after another, but after over forty moves, he could already feel a slight sluggishness in his sword movement. Slowly, he attached more and more inner strength onto his wooden sword, and every swing of his sword seemed to have created vague echoes of gust and thunder.

But no matter how resourceful the opponent's inner strength was, when those moves met the profound and subtle sword techniques of the "Dugu Nine Swords," they all came to nothing. Only that the man's outstanding prowess in inner strength and his superb ingeniousness in sword techniques had become simply inseparable from each other. Several times the man had already forced Linghu Chong into extremities, where Linghu Chong should have had no choice but to throw down his sword and submit, but Linghu Chong

would always be able to suddenly come up with some bizarre moves, which not only rescue himself out of the dead-end position, but also enable him to use the opportunity to launch his counterblow. The brilliance of these moves was simply unimaginably queer.

Mr. Huang-Zhong and the rest three Manor Masters crowded over the iron door and watched through the square-shaped hole. The hole was so small that there was only space for two persons to watch at the same time, and even with the two persons watching, one had to watch only with his left eye while the other one watched only with his right eye. So two of them would watch for a while before moving aside to let the other two watch for the next while.

At the beginning, the four of them gasped in admiration when they watched the marvelous sword moves exchanged between the man and Linghu Chong, but soon afterwards, they could no longer understand the brilliance in the two's sword moves. Sometimes after Mr. Huang-Zhong saw a move, he had to ponder upon the subtlety within the move with all his might. Only after a long contemplation was he able to comprehend. But by then, the two men inside had already exchanged another dozen moves, and he pretty much had been turning a blind eye on how those next dozen moves had panned out. After he finally got over the initial amazement, he couldn't help but wonder.

"It turned out that Brother Feng's sword skills have reached such an extreme. When he fought me earlier, he probably only utilized thirty or forty percent of his true skills. I had thought that my 'Seven-String Invisible Sword' from my zither failed to subdue him only because he had no inner strength. But even if he does have resourceful of inner strength, my 'Invisible Sword' wouldn't have had any impact just the same. All he had to do was to launch three quick attacking moves, and I would have no choice but to drop my zither and admit defeat. If it had been a fight for survival, he

could have easily blinded my eyes with the jade flute in his first move.”

Mr. Huang-Zhong, of course, had no idea that he had really overrated Linghu Chong’s sword skills. The “Dugu Nine Swords” was a Kung Fu that turned more powerful when the opponent was stronger. If the opponent were not adequate, then the brilliant techniques in the “Dugu Nine Swords” would not have been applicable. The man Linghu Chong was fighting today was a world-shaking figure in the entire Martial World. The aptitude of his Kung Fu had reached a level that’s well out of people’s imagination. Only with the stimulation from his extraordinary Kung Fu, were the many profound and subtle aspects of the “Dugu Nine Swords” able to make the most revealing performance. Even if Dugu Seeking-A-Loss could come back to life, or if Feng Qingyang had come himself, they would have found great joy fighting such a capable opponent. To successfully use the “Dugu Nine Swords” relied on not only a very good understanding of the sword techniques and variations, but also the intelligence of the practitioner, where the second part played even a bigger part. Once the practitioner had reached a stage where he could extend at will with no restraints and no boundaries, then the more intelligent the practitioner was, the more brilliant the sword art would become, and to him, each sword contest would have been like a poet composing a wonderful poem after following his greatest inspirations.

After another forty moves or so, Linghu Chong found himself fighting with greater and greater facility. Many of the clever knacks he used were ones that even Fang Qingyang had never mentioned before. On encountering the brilliant sword moves from his opponent, the “Dugu Nine Swords” spontaneously originated corresponding moves to counter. At the moment fear had been completely cleared off his mind, or in another word, he had been concentrating wholeheartedly in the art of sword, having no leisure for any feeling of fear or delight on his mind. That man changed into

eight different styles of advanced sword arts in succession, some uninterrupted and unbroken, some delicate and swift, some others firm and forceful, but regardless of how he changed his moves, Linghu Chong was able to handle the with ease, as though these eight sword arts were ones he had been trained to spar against ever since he was young.

The man suddenly swung his sword in a block and yelled out loud, "Little friend, who on earth taught you your sword art? I don't think Reverend Feng has that capability."

Linghu Chong was slightly surprised. "If this weren't taught by Reverend Feng, who else could have it been?" he uttered.

"That is true! Why don't you try this sword form of mine?" the man demanded.

He let out a long howl and suddenly brought his wooden sword swishing down from above. Linghu Chong thrust out in a tilted angle and forced him to withdraw his attack to block. The man roared again and again as though he had gone completely mad. The more pressing his roars were, the faster his attacks became. Linghu Chong didn't find anything peculiar about this sword form, but each of the thundering roars made his ears buzz uncomfortably and made him feel annoyed and perplexed. He tried to hold his calm with difficulty and continued breaking the opponent's attacks, but suddenly, the man let out an earth-shattering and heaven-battering howl. Linghu Chong felt a loud ring in his ear as though his eardrums had been shattered by the thunderous shock. A strong dizziness quickly consumed him and before he knew it, he had collapsed to the floor and lost his consciousness.



# Notes

[←1]

Emei in Chinese genuinely means beautiful women. Emei sting here has nothing to do with Emei Sect mentioned earlier in the novel. It's used because the weapon is specifically used by women.

[←2]

Just want to clarify that the character Feng here is a different one from the Feng in Feng Qingyang's name.

[←3]

Three religions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Nine schools of thought: the Confucians, the Taoists, the Yin-Yang, the Legalists, the Logicians, the Mohists, the Political Strategists, the Eclectics, and the Agriculturists.

[ ←4]

A phrase used to include all aspects of weaponry. The eighteen types of weaponry are: Saber, spear, sword, halberd, axe, battle-axe, hook, fork, whip, mace, hammer, talon, trident-halberd, cudgel, long-handled spear, short cudgel, stick, and meteor hammer.

[←5]

According to Chinese Medical Theory, these are main and collateral channels, regarded as a network of passages, through which vital energy circulates and along which the acupuncture points are distributed.

[←6]

Tai Chi is really a term used by ancient Chinese philosophers to refer to the infinite universe.

[←7]

Heaven Drum (Tian-Gu), Jade Honey (Yu-Jiang), Corona Pool (Hua-Chi), and Golden Beam (Jin-Liang) are four different major acupuncture points on a human body.

[ ←8]

Bluffing the enemy by opening the gates of a weakly defended city. Presenting a bold front to conceal a weak defense. Zhu Geliang and Sima Yi were both real historical figures in ancient China. See their story in Romance of the Three Kingdoms.



[ ←9]

Di Xiu's Master is an apprentice brother of Zuo Lengchan, the Head Master of Songshan Sword School, that's why Di referred to Zuo as Head Uncle-Master.

[←10]

Once a person's Mute Point is sealed, he will temporarily lose the ability to speak.

[←11]

An intimate way of calling Yilin.

[←12]

When one becomes a Buddhist monk, he will no longer be referred to using his real name. He will get a name in the Buddhist 's order and he is supposed to forget his real name as part of the Four Emptiness Doctrine.

[←13]

The title “Great Master” is a respectful way of calling a member of the Buddhist order.

[←14]

A style of Chinese calligraphy, often used on seals.

[←15]

These names of majors and minors are used in ancient Chinese musical theories.

[←16]

Pulse checking was a standard procedure performed by doctors in ancient China. By checking the patient's pulse, the doctor would be able to find out what might have gone wrong with the patient.



[←17]

Huang Di was a legendary character in the very ancient times (before any of the dynasties). He was considered the very ancestor of all Chinese people.

[←18]

Yue Fei, also named Yue Pengju, was one of the most legendary national heroes in Chinese history. He was the general in the Northern Song dynasty in charge of the Chinese army that defended Northern Song government against the Jin Empire's invading army.

[←19]

Jin Wushu was the general in charge of the Jin Empire's invading army.

[←20]

Yang Zai-Xing was a general under the command of General Yue Fei. He died a tragic death when he took a wrong path and found himself right in the middle of the enemy's trap. He was shot dead by the Jin army's many archers.

[←21]

Golden Blade Grandpa Yang is a figure from the folklore about the Yang Family Corp. Golden Blade Grandpa Yang was a general for the Northern Song dynasty. His army was surrounded by the Liao Empire's army. He refused to surrender and committed suicide. He had seven sons, and all seven sons became generals in the Northern Song army and fought the Liao Empire's invading army.

[←22]

Yang the Sixth was the sixth son of Golden Blade Grandpa Yang. He became the commander in chief for the Northern Song army. He was also the only heir of Golden Blade Grandpa Yang that lived long enough to have children to carry the Yang Family's name down the line.

[←23]

Yang the Seventh was the seventh son of Golden Blade Grandpa Yang. He was the best fighter among the seven sons, but died in a young age.

[←24]

Yang Zongbao was the son of Yang the Sixth. He was also a general of the Northern Song army.



[←25]

Yang Wenguang was the son of Yang Zongbao. He fought in the Northern Song army also.

[←26]

In Chinese, Xing means happy.

[←27]

Fen-Wine is a famous type of wine that is made in Fenyang, Shan-Xi (first intonation) Province. Even today, Fen-Wine remains one of the best wine brands in China.

[←28]

The same Shao-Wine Tian Boguang mentioned in Chapter 9.

[←29]

In Chinese, “Zu Zong” means ancestor.

[←30]

Zu Di was a real historic figure in the Han Dynasty. When he was still young, he got up at the first crow of a cock every morning to train in sword arts. Later his training paid off and he became a famous general, and the story of the morning training also became famous.

[←31]

This is quoted from Li Bai's poem: *Written as a Guest*. Li Bai is the most famous poet in the Tang Dynasty. If you still remember, his name was mentioned in Chapter 9. The poem described the poet's deep gratitude toward the host. The entire poem goes like this:

*Tulip leaves soaked the wonderful wine of Lanling,  
Jade Cups bring about the light of amber.  
If only the host can get the guest drunk,  
Everywhere becomes hometown*

.

[←32]

Pipa is an ancient Chinese music instrument.



[←33]

This is quoted from Wang Han's poem: *Poem of Liangzhou*. Wang Han is a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty. This poem describes the feelings of soldiers before going to battles. The entire poem goes like this:

*Wonderful Grape Wine filled the Luminous Cups;*

*I want to drink but the sound of Pipa is already calling me to my horseback.*

*If I get drunk and lie down on the battlefield, laugh me not.*

*From the many wars, how many soldiers can actually make it back?*

[←34]

This is quoted from Yue Fei's poem: *Red River Poem* (where Red River is the name of a poem style). Yue Fei was a legendary general who fought the Huns' invading army and defended the Song Dynasty. He was not only a great hero, but also a great poet, and Red River Poem is the most well known poem of his. Because of the length of the poem, I will not include the entire poem here.

[←35]

Xia Dynasty is the first dynasty in Chinese history. King Yu was very famous for his great achievement in flood-control.

[←36]

Jue is an ancient wine vessel with three legs and a loop handle.

[←37]

The reason Zu Qianqiu said so is because in the Northern Song Dynasty, China had a strong government and defeated many foreign invasions. During the Southern Song Dynasty, the government's power declined more and more and China lost many battles with the foreign invaders. Then at the end of the Southern Song Dynasty, the Mongolian army invaded and took over China and founded the Yuan Dynasty. The Han Chinese overthrown the Mongolian ruler at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and started the Ming Dynasty.

[←38]

Bai Juyi is a famous poet in the Tang Dynasty. This poem illustrated the beautiful spring scenery of the city of Hangzhou. Because of the length of the poem, I will not include the entire poem here.

## [←39]

Legend said that toward the end of the Qin Dynasty, Liu Bang was a Pavilion Officer (the lowest ranking official at the time), and he was ordered to escort laborers to Mount Li. But during the trip, many of the laborers died because of the harsh conditions, so Liu Bang decided to let all the escorted laborers flee for life. Only about ten men decided to stay and follow him. That night, Liu Bang drank too much and became drunk. He sent one man ahead of the group to check the road, and that man returned with a report that a giant snake had blocked the road. In the drunkenness, Liu Bang feared nothing so he ran forward and slain the giant white snake to clear the way. Later he fell asleep a little further down the road. An old woman began crying at where he slain the snake. People asked her why she cried, and the old woman answered that someone had killed her son. People then asked her how her son was killed. She answered that her son was the son of the White Heaven and had transformed into the white snake, and was killed by the son of the Red Heaven. Later Liu Bang heard the story and his confidence was boosted dramatically, that was when he decided to start a rebellion army to overthrow the current emperor. (Emperors call themselves sons of the Heaven to establish the divine status.)

## [ ←40]

Hongman is in Shanxi province. In 206 B.C., Liu Bang declared himself the Lord of Hanzhong. Xiang Yu, Liu Bang's main rivalry, led his army and came to Hongman, ready to eliminate Liu Bang's army. His advisor Fan Zeng suggested Xiang to set up a banquet and invite Liu Bang so they could assassinate him at the banquet. At the time, Liu Bang's army was no match for Xiang Yu's army, so he had to come to the banquet to apologize to Xiang. Only Liu Bang and his advisor, Zhang Liang, were allowed into the banquet. During the banquet, Xiang's advisor Fan Zeng ordered Xiang Zhuang, Xiang Yu's general, to perform a sword dance to entertain the guests and then assassinate Liu in the sword dance when he had a chance. Liu Bang's advisor Zhang Liang immediately walked out of the tent and informed Liu's general, Fan Kuai, who in turn, immediately ran into the tent and interrupted the banquet. Xiang Yu offered Fan some meat, which Fan ate using his shield as the plate. Xiang Yu then offered Fan some wine, which Fan drank using a big ladler. Xiang Yu liked the heroic spirit shown by Fan and called off Xiang Zhuang, the assassin. Later Liu Bang pretended to use the restroom and fled. By risking his own life, Fan Kuai saved Liu Bang's life. Liu Bang eventually destroyed Xiang Yu's army and then founded Han Dynasty.



[←41]

If you still remember from chapter 1, Zhong Kui was half-god half-human in Chinese mythology and had the special power to drive evil spirits away.

[←42]

The needle hat and the long narrow white banner are both objects used in funerals in ancient times.

[←43]

In Chinese, Zu means ancestor. Zu Qianqiu explained this when he first introduced himself in chapter 14.

[←44]

The Bu in the name Yue Buqun means no in Chinese.

[←45]

This idiom came from the story of “The Romance of the Three Kingdoms.” When Liu Bei borrowed the city of Jinzhou as his temporary base, he never intended to return it.

[←46]

In Chinese, Ji Wushi means out of one's wits.

[←47]

Han is the main nationality in China and account for 92% of the entire Chinese population. In the ancient time, minorities were always looked down upon somewhat because Han people considered themselves better civilized and educated.

[←48]

Yunnan is a province in the Southwest China that borders Vietnam and Burma.



[←49]

Miao is one of the minority nationalities in China.

[←50]

In ancient China, it was very inappropriate for females to expose their arms or legs to anyone, except their husbands.

[←51]

In Chinese myths, there was a god (with the appearance of a boy) named Ne Zha who could turn into a creature with three heads and six arms when he got into battles, and thus triple the fighting power.

[←52]

According to Eastern Medicine, it takes hundreds of years to for a ginseng to grow into the shape of a human body, and once it grows into the shape of a human body, its nutrition value becomes extraordinary or even magical.

[←53]

The Kunlun School is a famous martial arts school headquartered on Mount Kunlun. Mount Kunlun is a large mountain in the Xinjiang Province, a province in the northwest region of China bordering the many countries that used to be members of the former USSR.

[←54]

In Buddhist theory, the human body is only considered a vessel of the human soul. Once the soul leaves the body, the body becomes worthless.

[←55]

“Why use a cattle knife to kill the chicken” is a Chinese idiom. It originated from the book *The Analects of Confucius*. According to the book, Confucius traveled to Wu Chang and heard the sound of string instrument and heard the singing. Surprised that his student Zi You had succeeded in transforming the militant temperament of the local people and turned them into music loving people. The great sage said smilingly, “Why use a cattle knife to kill the chicken?” Today this idiom is used to imply that a person of great talent is used for a job of little importance. It’s similar to the English idiom “break a butterfly on the wheel.”

[←56]

It was recorded in the story *Legend of Fan Kuai* (yes, this is the same Fan Kuai we talked about in Chapter 14) in *The Book of Han* (a famous history book written in the Han Dynasty by Ban Gu) that “Kuai, born in the county of Pei, and made a living by butchering dogs.”



[←57]

Jade Emperor is the Supreme Deity of Taoism. He is the ultimate ruler of the entire heaven.

[←58]

It is tradition for a Buddhist monk to burn scars on his head using incense sticks to show his sincerity.

[←59]

Buddhists believe that if one persists in matters of the mortal world, he will not be able to attain the true meaning of Buddhism. But while mortal life is only a transient phase of a true Buddhist's incarnation, he should work wholeheartedly in releasing people in the mortal world from pain and sufferings.

Bodhidharma (also known as Pu Tai Ta Mo in Sanskrit and Daruma Daishi in Japanese) was an Enlightened Buddhist Master who is credited with reviving Buddhism in China and founding martial arts. Bodhidharma began his life as a royal prince in Southern India in the Sardilli family in 482 A.D. In the midst of his education and training to continue in his father's footsteps as king, Bodhidharma encountered the Buddha's teachings. He immediately saw the truth in Lord Buddha's words and decided to give up his esteemed position and inheritance to study with the famous Buddhist teacher Prajnatarā. Bodhidharma rapidly progressed in his Buddhist studies, and in time, Prajnatarā sent Bodhidharma to China, where Buddhism had begun to die out, to introduce the Sarvastivāda sect Buddhist teachings to the Chinese. Bodhidharma arrived in China after a brutal trek over Tibet's Himalayan Mountains surviving both the extreme elements and treacherous bandits. Upon arrival in China, the Emperor Wu Di, a devout Buddhist himself, requested an audience with Bodhidharma. During their initial meeting, Wu Di asked Bodhidharma what merit he had achieved for all of his good deeds. Bodhidharma informed him that he had accrued none whatsoever. Bodhidharma was subsequently unable to convince Wu Di of the value of the teachings he had brought from India. Bodhidharma then set out for Luoyang, crossed the Yangtze River on a leaf, and climbed Bear's Ear Mountain in the Songshan Mountain range where the Shaolin Temple was located. He meditated there in a small cave for nine years. Bodhidharma, in true Mahayana spirit, was moved to pity when he saw the terrible physical condition of the monks of the Shaolin Temple. The monks had practiced long-term meditation retreats, which made them spiritually strong but physically weak. He also noted that this meditation method caused sleepiness among the monks. Likening them to the young Shakyamuni, who almost died from practicing asceticism, he informed the monks that he would teach their bodies and their minds the Buddha's dharma through a two-part program of meditation and physical training. Bodhidharma created an exercise program for the monks, which involved physical techniques that were efficient, strengthened the body, and eventually, could be used practically in self-defense. When Bodhidharma instituted these practices, his primary concern was to make the monks physically strong enough to withstand both their isolated lifestyle and the deceptively demanding training that meditation requires. It turned out that the techniques served a dual purpose as a very efficient fighting system, which evolved into a martial arts style called Shaolin Kung Fu. Martial arts training helped the monks to defend themselves against invading warlords and bandits. Bodhidharma taught that martial arts should be used for self-defense, and never to hurt or injure needlessly. In fact, it is one of the oldest Shaolin axioms that "one who engages in combat has already lost the battle." Bodhidharma, a member of the Indian Kshatriya warrior class and a master of staff fighting, developed a system of 18 dynamic tension exercises. These movements found their way into

print in 550 A.D. as the Yi Jin Jing, or Tendon Altering Sutra. We know this system today as the Luohan (Priest-Scholar) 18 Hand Movements, the basis of Shaolin Temple Boxing and the Shaolin Arts.

[←61]

It is tradition to attach small bells to a horse in China. The pleasant ringing of the bells also are useful as signals to inform pedestrians about the coming of the running horse so they would have plenty of time to move out of the way.

[←62]

A type of dart that shoots out from one's sleeves.

## [←63]

This idiom came from a story recorded in the book Shi Ji (Historical Records) by Sima Qian: In the battle with the army of Zhao, Han general Han Xin ordered his troops to form a battling formation with their backs to the river. With a mighty Zhao army in front of them and no way to retreat to behind their backs, the Han soldiers had no choice but to conquer or die. Even though the Zhao army was much larger than the Han army, the Han soldiers fought with all their might and crushed the Zhao army. This is one of the most famous battles in Chinese history. Later people use this idiom to describe one's determination to conquer or fight to death.



[←64]

Gold cast into the shape of leaves for the convenience of travelers.

[←65]

The world's most ancient man-made waterway, China's Grand Canal, a system still in use up to the 21st Century, was built in the Sui Dynasty in 606 AD, which linked the Yangtze, Yellow and Huai rivers, requiring the conscription of up to two million workers.

[←66]

South of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

[←67]

Turfan is a famous city in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. It's very famous for its high temperature in the summer. And because of the special climate, the city produces world-renowned Hami melons and grapes. The famous Mountain of Blaze described in the novel Journey to the West is located right next to the city of Turfan.

[←68]

Great Master Xuan-Zang, or Tang Seng (Monk from Tang Dynasty), journeyed all the way to India in order to retrieve the true Buddhist Scriptures. Later, his story was written into the famous novel, Journey to the West.

[ ←69]

A Chinese game for two, played with black and white counters on a board that is ruled with 19 vertical and 19 horizontal lines. You can visit [this web page](#) by Mindy McAdams for more information about the game of Go.

[←70]

Legend has it that in the Jin Dynasty, there was a young woodman named Wang Zhi. One day when he went up the mountain to chop woods as usual, he saw two old men playing a game of Go, so he set his axe aside and watched by the side. By the time the game was over and the two old men had left, he decided to gather his axe and get on with his work. That was when he found out that the helve of his axe had decayed completely. Very baffled, he went down the mountain, only to find out that five hundred years had passed and everybody he had known had all passed away. Because this story was so wide spread that people of the later generations gave the game of Go a nickname: Decayed Helve.

[←71]

Legend has it that in the Northern Song Dynasty, Liu Zhongpu, the National Champion in the game of Go, played a game of Go with a young girl in a teahouse. Liu's white pieces took all the upper hands in the game. Very pleased with himself, Liu made no effort of concealing his arrogance, so the young girl excused herself and soon returned with a granny, who picked up where the young girl had left off in the game of Go. With much ease, the granny placed her pieces on the board quickly and completely turned the game around, knocking Liu off his feet. The utmost anxiety and desperation hit Liu hard and he began spitting up blood from the frustration. Only after he had lost the game did he realize that the young girl and the granny were not human but celestial beings.



[←72]

Legend has it that when Xuan-Zong, the emperor of Tang, fled to Szechwan because of An Lushan's revolt. Wang Jixin, his royal champion of Go, also followed. And along the way, one day, Wang Jixin put up for the night under the eave of an old farmer granny's house, when he heard the bed talk between the old granny and her daughter-in-law. Turned out they were playing a game of Go while lying on bed in the dark simply by spelling out their moves. Greatly shaken by the brilliant moves, Wang Jixin memorized all the moves in the game quietly. The next morning when he tried to consult the old granny and her daughter-in-law, he found out that the house was actually an abandoned house with no one living in it. He suspected that the old granny and her daughter-in-law were actually fairy foxes who had assumed human shape.

[←73]

Confucius looked on the game of Go as a waste of time, thus criticized it as unorthodox school.

[←74]

These are terms in the game of Go. Please see [this web page](#) for more information.

[←75]

See the painting [here](#).

[←76]

A highly cursive script style in Chinese calligraphy (a subset of Grass Style calligraphy) executed with strokes flowing together. Not only the style writing is free and easy, but also fast.

[←77]

The style of calligraphy for inscriptions on drum-shaped stone blocks of the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.)

[←78]

Han Yu, a famous poet, writer, and philosopher of the Tang Dynasty.

[←79]

See the calligraphy book [here](#).



[←80]

Yan Zhenqing (709-785AD) is a famous calligraphy artist during the Tang Dynasty who created the Yan Style of Chinese Calligraphy.

[←81]

Six Directions: The six cardinal directions: front, back, left, right, above, and below, meaning all under heaven.

[←82]

Nine Fields: North, South, East, West, Middle, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Southeast, meaning the world.

[←83]

A famous general during the Three Kingdoms period. See *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* for the story of Zhang Fei.

[←84]

Huai Su was another very famous Calligraphy Artist in Chinese history. See the calligraphy book [here](#).

[←85]

A special term in the game of Go. Please see [this web page](#) for more information.

[←86]

The first temperament of the “Twelve Temperaments” used in ancient music. Huang-Zhong is the lowest out of the twelve and all other temperaments are derived from it.

[←87]

Chinese idiom. For a frog living at the bottom of a well, because the frog could only see the sky in the shape of the opening of the well, so the frog thought that the sky must have been only as big as the opening of the well. The idiom is used to depict a man of ignorance and with a very limited outlook,



[←88]

The character “Feng” stands for wind in Chinese.

**The Smiling,  
Proud  
Wanderer:  
Volume 3**

**Jin Yong**

# **The Smiling, Proud Wanderer**

(笑傲江湖 / Xiào Ào Jiānghú)

## **Volume 3**

by

**Jin Yong**

### **Translators:**

Lanny Lin

Pokit

Bliss

### **Editor:**

HHaung

# Contents

[Chapter 21: Life in Prison](#)

[Chapter 22: Out of Trouble](#)

[Chapter 23: Ambush](#)

[Chapter 24: Injustice](#)

[Chapter 25: Information](#)

[Chapter 26: Besieging the Temple](#)

[Chapter 27: Three Fights](#)

[Chapter 28: Accumulation of Snow](#)

[Chapter 29: Headmaster](#)

[Chapter 30: Secret Meeting](#)

# **Chapter 21: Life in Prison**

**Translated by Lanny Lin**



**Before Black-White Piece could figure out his mistake, his wrist was already seized. In a hurry, he rotated his wrist to grab back while pulling his arm back, and then swiftly kicked out with his left foot.**

When Linghu Chong finally came around, he found himself surrounded by complete darkness, knowing neither where he was nor how long he had been out cold. The headache was so bad that he almost felt as though somebody had cracked his head open and loud thunder-like rings still rumbled continuously in his ears. He tried in vain to get back onto his feet but found no strength left in him at all.

"I must be dead already and have been buried into a grave," he thought as the strong sense of grief and fuss quickly overwhelmed him and he fainted once again.

By the time he woke up the second time, although his headache didn't get any better, the ringing in his ears did lighten up a great deal. He felt something cold and hard underneath him as though he was lying upon something made of iron or steel. A quick feel with his hand soon confirmed that it was indeed a steel plate underneath the straw mat. As soon as he moved his right hand, a light clank broke out, and at the same time he felt something icy-cold tied around his wrist. When he tried to feel it with his left hand, the clanking sound rose again. Turned out that his left wrist also had something tied around it. A mixed feeling of shock, joy, and fear soared in his heart. Now he was sure that he had not died but had been shackled. He felt it again with his left hand and then came to realization that it was a thin steel chain tied around his wrist. A slight move of his two feet also revealed steel chains shackled around his ankles. He opened his eyes as wide as he could and stared forward, but did not see even a glimmer of light.

"I was having a sword match with the Revered Mr. Ren right before I fainted. How did I fall for the machination of the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan?" he asked himself. "It looks as though I am also locked up in the dungeon underneath the

lake. Have I been locked up in the same place together with the Revered Mr. Ren?" At that thought, he called out immediately, "Revered Mr. Ren? Revered Mr. Ren?"

He called out twice, but did not hear anything in return. Feeling of great shock grew stronger and stronger in his heart and he called out even louder, "Mr. Ren! Mr. Ren!" But once again, all he could hear in the pitch black were his own hoarse and vexed cries.

As desperation began to sink in, he shouted out at the top of his lungs, "First Master! Fourth Master! Why have you locked me in here? Let me out! Let me out!" But other than his own shouting, there was not another sound all the while.

Soon panic turned into rage, and he began pouring out streams of abuses, "You despicable, brazen, evil scum! You couldn't beat me in the sword matches, so you figured that you could lock me up here to get even? How shameless you are!" But the thought that he would be locked up in the dark dungeon underneath the lake for the rest of his life just like the Revered Mr. Ren instantly made his hair stand on end and his heart filled with despair. The more he thought about it, the more afraid he became, he couldn't help but bawl on top of his lungs, and before he knew it, the bawling had turned into loud wails, and tears had streamed down his cheeks uncontrollably.

"You four...four despicable scoundrels...of the Plum Manor," he cried in a hoarse voice, "If I can make it out of here one day, I'll...I'll blind...blind your eyes with my sword, and sever...sever both your arms and legs.... Once I escape the dark dungeon...." But suddenly he fell silent when a loud voice echoed in his head, "Will I ever escape the dark dungeon? Will I ever escape the dark dungeon? Even Revered Mr. Ren, such a capable man, can't get out. How... how can I make a difference?" Anxiety immediately surged in his heart. Feeling really sick in his stomach, he vomited, and after a few gags of blood, he fainted again.



In the wooziness, he thought he heard a cracking sound, and immediately after, bright light dazzled his eyes. Waking up abruptly, he leapt to his feet, but he forgot that both of his wrists and ankles were still shackled by steel chains. Furthermore, he did not have much strength left in him, so only instants later, he fell back down heavily and all the bones in his body seemed to have been falling apart. Having been in complete darkness for a long while, his eyes were not adept to sudden lights, but for fear that the gleam of light might just vanish as abruptly as it appeared, voiding him of any opportunity to escape, he kept his eyes wide open and stared hard toward the origin of the light despite the stinging pain.

The gleam of light had come from a one-foot wide, square-shaped opening. And he remembered at once: the dungeon cell Revered Mr. Ren lived in also had a squared-shaped opening on the iron door. In fact, it had one exactly identical to this one. He took a quick glance around and then confirmed that he was, indeed, also locked in the same kind of dungeon cell.

"Let me out of here! Huang-Zhong, Black-White, you despicable scoundrels, let me out if you've got any guts!" he shouted out.

A large wooden tray came forth slowly through the square-shaped opening, on top of which was a large bowl of rice with some cooked food piled on top. There was also an earthen jar, which apparently held some soup or water.

This sight made Linghu Chong even angrier, thinking, "Bringing food and water to me only means that you want to lock me in here for an extended period." So he cursed loudly, "You four dirty swine, listen up! If you want me dead, just come forward and give me your best shot. Stop playing games!"

But the wooden tray remained still. The person outside the door obviously wanted him to take the tray in. Infuriated, Linghu Chong reached out and struck it hard. Loud clangs

echoed as the rice bowl and the earthen jar fell to the ground and smashed into pieces. Food and soup splashed everywhere. Slowly, the wooden tray retracted out of the opening.

In a storm of rage, Linghu Chong threw himself at the squared-shaped opening, and then he saw a completely gray-headed old man, a light in his left hand and the wooden tray in his right hand, turning away unhurriedly. Deep wrinkles covered the man's entire face, a face Linghu Chong had never seen before.

"Go get Huang-Zhong or Black-White here! Tell those four shameless scoundrels to come here and fight me like a man if they've gotten any guts!" Linghu Chong shouted out.

But the old man didn't pay him the slightest attention and kept walking further and further away unhurriedly, stooping low with his back.

Linghu Chong watched on as the man slowly disappeared around the corner of the tunnel. The light also gradually dimmed until it finally faded into gloom. After a short while, he vaguely heard the sounds of gates opening followed by sounds of the wooden gate and the iron gate closing down one after another. And then once again, the tunnel was enveloped by complete darkness, without a glimmer of light or the slightest of sound.

Linghu Chong felt another strong dizziness in his head. After staring blankly into the blackness for a moment, he decided to lie down on the bed for better concentration with his thoughts.

"The old man delivering food to me must have had strict orders to not exchange any word with me. It would be useless to shout at him," he thought to himself. "This dungeon cell looks identical to the one Revered Mr. Ren lives in. I guess there are quite a few prison cells built under the Plum Manor. I wonder how many people they have locked up down here. If somehow I can connect with the Revered Mr. Ren, or with any other fellow prisoners here, by working together and uniting

our efforts, who knows, we might be able to find a way out of here.”

At that thought, he extended his arm and knocked on the wall. But the clanking sounds clearly indicated that it was made of sheer steel. The sounds were both heavy and dull. Obviously there was no space on the other side of the wall except solid ground.

He walked to another wall and also knocked on it, but again, the responding sounds were both heavy and dull. Not willing to give up, Linghu Chong sat back on the bed and knocked on the wall behind him. Once again, the sounds were still the same.

Feeling his way along the walls, he carefully knocked on every inch of all the three walls, but other than the side of the wall with the iron door, this dungeon cell seemed to have been buried deep underground all alone. There, of course, had to be other dungeon cells underground, at least one another, which had the Ren named old man locked in. But he had no clue where that dungeon cell might be or even how far it was from his own cell.

Leaning against the wall, he very carefully reviewed, in his head, the series of events that had happened before he fainted. He could remember how the old man's sword moves became faster and faster as his shouting also became louder and louder. Then, all of a sudden, there was that earthshaking roar, right after which he lost his consciousness. But how on earth was he captured by the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, and then sent to this prison cell, he couldn't remember a thing about it.

“The four Manor Masters all appeared to be talented persons of poetic temperament on the surface, even their day-to-day amusements are related to Music, Gamesmanship, Calligraphy, and Painting these Four Arts. Who would have imagined that underneath their pretending skin, they were all filthy, contemptible characters who stop at no evil,” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “There were many

vile characters like these in the Martial World and it shouldn't have come to one's surprise. But the strange thing was that these four Manor Masters did hold genuine interests in the art of music, gamesmanship, calligraphy, and painting, which would have been impossible for them to pretend. When Mr. Bald-Brush wrote the 'General Pei Poem' on the wall, his writing was completely free from inhibition, something not a normal martial arts master could have accomplished."

Then he thought, "Master once said, 'Only people with extreme aptitude are capable of extreme evil.' That is so true. The scam the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan pulled is indeed hard to guard against."

Suddenly a thought struck him. He cried out and jumped back onto his feet, his heart pounding madly. "What happened to Big Brother Xiang? Has he fallen for their murderous scheme as well?" But then he thought, "Big Brother Xiang is a man of shrewdness and improvisation. He seems to have known about the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan's conducts beforehand. As the Right Luminous Advisor of the Demon's Cult, he has roamed the Martial World for many years. He won't fall for their trap easily. And as long as he is not stranded by the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, he will try to rescue me for sure. Even if I were to be locked up one thousand feet below ground, Big Brother Xiang would still be able to get me out of here. He has the ability to do that." At that thought, he found himself much relaxed. Carrying a big grin on his face, he muttered to himself, "Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! Did you know that you are a real coward? Scared into crying like a baby, where are you going to hide your face if people find out about this?"

Feeling relieved, he stood up slowly, then immediately realized how thirsty and hungry he had been. "Too bad I threw a fit and knocked over the perfectly fine rice meal and the water. If I don't stuff myself, after Big Brother Xiang rescue me out of here, where am I gonna find strength to battle the Four Skunks of Jiangnan? Ha-ha, that's right, the

Four Skunks of Jiangnan! How can such vile skunks be worthy of the title the 'Four Playfellows of Jiangnan?' Out of the four skunks, Mr. Black-White had to be the most sinister one, always wearing that blank, collected countenance on his face. He is probably the one who came up with the entire scheme. Once I break out of here, killing him will be the first thing on my to-do list. Mr. Paint, on the other hand, seems to be relatively frank; I might as well spare his despicable life. But in regard to his collection of great wines, ha-ha, I'll drink them all up, leaving not even one drop behind." At the thought of Mr. Paint's great wine collection, he found his mouth burning with thirst.

"How long have I been unconscious? Why hasn't Big Brother Xiang come to my rescue?" he wondered. Then another thought popped out, "Oh, no! If it were a fight one-on-one, Big Brother Xiang's Kung Fu skills are more than sufficient to defeat any one of the Four Skunks of Jiangnan. But if those four skunks attack Big Brother Xiang all at once, then Big Brother Xiang would have a hard time winning the battle. Even if Big Brother Xiang gave full play to his ability and kill all four of them, it would be impossible for him to find the entrance of this underground dungeon. Who would have expected to find the dungeon entrance hidden underneath Mr. Huang-Zhong's bed?"

Feeling completely worn out, he lay down on the bed when another thought suddenly came upon him. "The Revered Mr. Ren's Kung Fu skills are undoubtedly greater than those of Big Brother Xiang's, and his wit, experience and foresight also outclass that of Big Brother Xiang. Even he became a prisoner in the dungeon, what makes Big Brother Xiang so special that he could ensure victory? Straightforward gentlemen often fall prey of machination from the vile. It is well said that covert attack is far more difficult to defend against than overt attack. Since Big Brother Xiang hasn't come to my rescue after such a long while, could he have fallen for their trap?" He instantly forgot

all about his own trouble, but began worrying about Xiang Wentian's safety, instead.

He let his thoughts go off into wild flights of fancy, and before long, he fell asleep. When he woke up again, he had no idea what time it was, and all he could see was still complete darkness.

"It is simply impossible for me to escape by myself," he thought to himself. "If, unfortunately, Big Brother Xiang also falls for their scheme, then who else might come to free me? Master has announced to the entire world that I am expelled from the Huashan Sword School; of course people from the orthodox schools won't be coming to my rescue. Ying-Ying, Ying-Ying...."

As soon as he thought of Ying-Ying, his spirit soared, and he sat up, thinking, "She asked Old Man to spread the word to the entire Martial World that she wants me killed; those people from the unorthodox schools of course won't be coming to my rescue, but what about her, herself? If she learned that I am trapped here, she would surely come to save me. Many people from the unorthodox schools follow her commands. All she needs to do is to let the word out. Ha-ha...." He suddenly chortled, thinking, "This girl is so bashful. What she fears the most is people saying that she likes me. Even if she does come to my rescue, she would surely come alone and would never ask for help from anyone. And if someone learns that she is coming to save me, he most probably would lose his life because of that. Alas, what goes on in a girl's thinking is truly incomprehensible. Like, for example, Little Apprentice Sister...."

As soon as Little Apprentice Sister came to his mind, his heart ached, and the feeling of grief and despair deepened. "Why am I hoping that someone might come and rescue me? By now, Little Apprentice Sister and junior apprentice brother Lin probably have already wedded. Even if I can get out of here somehow, what's there to look for outside? It's probably

much better if I get locked up in this dark dungeon for the rest of my life and I never find out what happens outside.”

Once he figured out the benefit of being locked up in the dungeon, his worries seemed to have slipped away and he even felt somewhat pleased with the situation. But the elated feeling did not last long when he was soon overwhelmed with hunger and thirst. Haunted by the memories of the great enjoyments he had when he drank bowls after bowls of wine served with large steaks in the various wine houses, he decided it would still be better if he could get out of the dungeon, after all.

“Well, if Little Apprentice Sister wedded junior apprentice brother Lin, so what? I’ve already been pushed around by others many times, anyhow. I am already an invalid with none of my inner strength left in me. Doctor Ping said that I don’t have many days left. Even if Little Apprentice Sister is willing to marry me, I can’t marry her. How can I let her stay a widow the rest of her life?”

But deep in his heart, he still felt that even though he wouldn’t let Yue Lingshan marry him even if she wanted to, Yue Lingshan’s falling in love with Lin Pingzhi was just too agonizing for him to withstand. But what could he wish for? “I wish Little Apprentice Sister were still the same as before. I wish none of this had ever happened, and I would still be practicing sword arts with her in the waterfall atop Mount Huashan, and junior apprentice brother Lin never came to Mount Huashan, and Little Apprentice Sister and I would be happily spending the rest of our lives together. Alas, Tian Boguang, Peach Valley’s Six Fairies, apprentice sister Yilin....”

At the thought of Heng-Shan Sword School’s little Sister Yilin, he could no longer hold a straight face and a gentle smile crept onto his lips. “I wonder how this apprentice sister Yilin is doing right now,” he thought. “If she learns that I am locked up here, she must be very worried. Her Master undoubtedly wouldn’t allow her to come and save me after reading the letter from my Master, but she might ask her

father, Monk No-Commandment, to do it for her. Who knows, Monk No-Commandment might even invite the Peach Valley's Six Fairies to tag along. Ha, those seven are a total mess and would only mess things up even more. But having people coming for my rescue is still better than having no one paying any attention."

When he thought of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies' constant nagging and arguing, he couldn't help but grin. When they were around him in the past, he did belittle the six brothers somewhat, but at this point in time, how he wished they could be accompanying him inside the prison cell. Their unintelligible remarks would have sounded like heavenly music to his ears at the moment. He let his thoughts run wild and soon dozed off once again.

In the pitch black dungeon cell he had no way of knowing the time. In his wooziness, he noticed a glimmer of faint light coming through the squared-shaped opening. Linghu Chong was ecstatic. He sat up immediately, his heart thumping wildly, thinking, "Who has come to rescue me?" But his joy did not last long. Soon came the sound of heavy and slow footsteps, apparently from the old man who brought food to him. Much dispirited, he let his body collapse back down.

"Ask those four skunks to come here; see if they've still got any guts to show their faces here!" Linghu Chong shouted.

He could hear the sound of the footsteps getting closer and closer. The light also became brighter and brighter. Then a wooden tray was pushed in from the squared-shaped opening on the door. On the wooden tray were a large bowl of rice and an earthen jar just like the last time. Linghu Chong had been fighting his hunger for a good while and his thirst had also become unbearable. After a slight hesitation, he reached out and took the wooden tray. As soon as the old man let go of the wooden tray, he turned around to walk away.



“Hey! Hey! Wait a second! I have something to ask you!” Linghu Chong called out.

But the old man completely ignored him. Sound of footsteps faded gradually as the old man dragged his feet along the way and the light also faded gradually. Linghu Chong murmured a few curses and then picked up the earthen jar. Raising the jar next to his mouth, he poured the content into his mouth. Sure enough, the jar was filled with clear water. He drank up almost half jar of water in one breath before touching the bowl of rice. Piled on top of the rice were some vegetables. He tasted them in the dark and was able to tell there were some radish, tofu, and the like.

The same routine went on for seven or eight days. The old man would bring food to him once everyday and then collect the previous day’s utensils and water jar together with the jug for human waste. Regardless of what Linghu Chong said to him, his face remained expressionless. Then one day, as soon as Linghu Chong saw the light, he threw himself at the square-shaped opening and grabbed the wooden tray, shouting, “Why don’t you speak to me? Haven’t you heard me?”

The old man pointed at his own ear and shook his head, indicating that he was deaf. Then he opened his mouth. What Linghu Chong saw shocked him and he couldn’t help but gasp. The old man only had half of his tongue left in his mouth; the scene was horrific.

“Someone cut your tongue off? Did the four god-damned Manor Masters do this to you?” Linghu Chong uttered.

The old man did not answer and simply pushed the wooden tray through the square-shaped opening. He obviously could not hear Linghu Chong’s words. Even if he could, he had no way of answering.

Linghu Chong was terrified. Even after the old man had long left, he couldn’t bring himself to eat. The terrifying image of the old man’s remaining portion of his tongue flashed again and again in front of his eyes.

“Those Four Skunks of Jiangnan are too evil,” he murmured to himself as hatred quickly filled his heart. “Unless I am locked up here for life, if one day Linghu Chong can escape from this dungeon, I swear that I’ll find the four skunks, and one by one, I’ll cut off their tongues, drill their ears, and prick their eyes....”

Suddenly he thought of something from deep within his memories. “Could it have been them...them...?” He remembered that night how he blinded the fifteen masked men’s eyes outside of the monastery, but as to the origin of those people, he never found out. “Could it be that they locked me up in this dungeon cell to take vengeance for their suffering?” At that thought, he heaved a long sigh, and much of the grudge and hatred built up in the past many days evaporated instantly. “I blinded those fifteen men’s eyes. It’s only natural that they want their revenge,” he thought aloud.

Once his anger eased off, each day seemed to be a bit easier to get by. There was no difference between days and nights in the underground prison; Linghu Chong completely lost track of days and could only tell that each day was hotter than the previous day. He figured that it must have been mid-summer already. There was not even a whiff of wind in the small dungeon cell. The humid heat just got worse and worse everyday. Then the day came when the heat became simply unbearable. With steel chains shackled around his wrists and ankles, he could not take off his clothes completely. Having no other alternatives, he could only pull his shirt upward and pushed his pants downward as much as he could. After rolling the ragged mat on the bed and placing it to a corner of the bed, he lay down on the steel plate half naked. Immediately, he felt cool and refreshing and his perspiration also improved dramatically. It didn’t take long for him to fall asleep. A few hours went by quickly. In the daze, when he felt the part of steel plate under his body had been heated up by him, he moved his body inward to find a cooler spot. Pressing his left palm on the steel plate, he

vaguely felt some kind of lines of patterns carved onto the steel plate, but in the heavy drowsiness, he paid no attention to it and soon was sound asleep.

This nap was so comfortable; when Linghu Chong woke up, he felt completely refreshed. Not long after, the old man came as usual, delivering food to him. Linghu Chong had great sympathy for the old man, and every time when the old man pushed the wooden tray in through the square-shaped opening, he would always squeeze the old man's finger gently or pat a few times on the old man's hand to show his compassion. This time was no exception. After he took the wooden tray and was just about to retract his arms, all of a sudden, under the dim light, he spotted three words imprinted on the back of his left hand. It clearly said, "Woxing gets stranded."

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded, having no clue where these words had come from. After a short contemplation, he hurriedly placed the wooden tray on the floor and reached out to feel the steel plate on the bed. Turned out the steel plate was covered with carved words, so thickly dotted, he couldn't even tell how many there were. Linghu Chong understood at once. The words were carved onto the steel plate before he even came, but because the steel plate had always been covered by the mat, he was never aware of it, until yesterday when he slept half-naked directly on top of the steel plate. That was how the words got imprinted on the back of his hand. Extending his hand to his backside he felt his back and his behind, and he was unable to stifle a laugh. There were words marked on his skin everywhere he felt. Each character was about the size of a copper coin. The strokes were very deep, but the handwriting was hasty and careless.

By then the old man who delivered the food had been long gone and the dungeon cell was once again engulfed in complete darkness. Linghu Chong's curiosity overpowered his hunger. After taking a few quick drinks from the earthen

jar, he began feeling the words carved on the steel plate slowly from the very beginning, one character at a time, and read them out in a soft voice:

“I have been straightforward and willful all my life, killing people like flies. Imprisonment underneath the lake probably is the retribution I deserve. Only that when the old fellow Ren Woxing gets stranded...” At this character, Linghu Chong thought, “So the words ‘Woxing gets stranded’ came from this sentence.” He went on feeling the characters and the words continued, “...here, his extraordinary divine art that exceeds lofty will inevitably perish together with the old fellow’s skeleton, and people in the aftertime would not have known his exceptional and magical power. What a great pity that would be!”

Linghu Chong paused and raised his head. “Old fellow Ren Woxing!<sup>1</sup> Old fellow Ren Woxing!” he pondered. “Then the man who carved these words of course is named Ren Woxing. So this man’s last name is Ren as well. I wonder if he is related to the Revered Mr. Ren in anyway.” But then he thought better of it, “This underground prison probably was built a long time ago, and the man who carved these words probably passed away decades or even centuries ago.”

He went on feeling the characters and the carvings read, “That’s why I am writing down the succinct principles and secrets of my divine art, so people from the aftertime can practice the divine art and gain the ability to freely roam the world, then although the old man’s flesh will parish, his name will become immortal. Number one, Sitting Meditation....” Then what followed were various breathing exercises and meditation techniques.

Ever since Linghu Chong learned the “Dugu Nine Swords,” he was only fond of sword art in the many types of Martial Arts, and since he had lost all his inner strength, when he recognized the words “Sitting Meditation,” his heart was filled with disappointment. He hoped that somewhere within the remaining words from which he would be able to

find a form of exceptional sword art and he might as well learn this sword art as self-entertainment inside the dark dungeon cell. The hope of escape had become more and more distant and indistinct. If he didn't find something to occupy himself, life in prison could be very difficult. But the words afterwards were always terms for inner strength cultivation such as "breathing," "concentrate the spirit in the lower abdomen," "redirecting the strength to Jin-Jing<sup>2</sup>," "Ren Passage" and the like. He followed the characters all the way to the end of the steel plate and still couldn't find even one character resembling the character "sword."

Linghu Chong found himself utterly frustrated. "What extraordinary divine art that exceeds the lofty? This man has played a good joke on me! It could have been any other type of Martial Arts; why did it have to be an art of inner strength cultivation, the only one I cannot practice? As soon as I try to gather my inner strength, the energy streams inside my chest and abdomen would roll over and over, clashing with each other. I'd be asking for trouble myself if practice inner strength cultivation." He heaved a heavy sigh and picked up the rice bowl to eat, thinking to himself, "What kind of person is this Ren Woxing? He was certainly very arrogant, talking about exceeding lofty and roaming the world, as though he had no match in the entire world. This dungeon turned out to be used specifically to imprison superior Kung Fu Masters."

When he first discovered the words carved on the steel plate, his excitement soared high, but by now he had the least interest left in him, thinking, "Heaven can really play tricks on mortals. I probably wouldn't feel so down if I never found these words." Then he thought, "If that Ren Woxing was as capable as how he boasted himself, why he was still stranded here and couldn't get away? Evidently this underground prison is simply too durable and secure to break out. Regardless of how capable the captive is, once locked in, all he could do is to slowly and painfully wait for his end to

come." Having come to a conclusion, he paid no more attention to the words on the steel plate.

The city of Hangzhou almost turned into a steam box in the hot summer time. The dungeon was located deep underneath the lake. Without getting the heat from the direct sunshine, it should have been much cooler, but firstly, the dungeon had no ventilation, and secondly, it had always been overly humid, it turned out a different type of misery for its occupant. Everyday Linghu Chong would strip off as much clothing as he could and sleep on the steel plate half-naked. Whenever he moved his hand, he would feel the carved characters on the steel plate. As days went by, he had memorized many of the words and sentences subconsciously. One day when he was wondering where his Master, Master-Wife and Little Apprentice Sister might be and whether they had returned to Mount Huashan, he suddenly heard the sound of footsteps coming toward him. This time, the sound was quick and light, completely different from the sound made by the food-delivering old man. After spending many days locked inside, he had not been as anxiously looking forward to a rescuer, so when he suddenly heard the sound of a different set of footsteps, the feeling of surprise and joy instantly welled up his heart. He wanted to leap to his foot, but the ecstasy was so strong and overwhelming, he suddenly lost all his strength and could only lie still on the bed, not able to move a single muscle. The sound of footsteps quickly approached the iron-door.

A voice came from outside the iron-door, "Mr. Ren, it has been very hot in the last couple of days. May I ask if the revered mister still enjoys his good health?"

As soon as Linghu Chong heard the voice, he recognized it instantly. It was the voice of Mr. Black-White. If he had come to his cell one month before, Linghu Chong would have shouted all kinds of invective at him with no scruples. However, after many days of imprisonment, his anger had mollified a great deal and he was able to think calmly.

“Why did he call me Mr. Ren? Has he come to the wrong cell?” he thought to himself and decided to remain silent and listen on.

“Every two months, I come and ask the revered mister the same question. Today is the first day of July, so please allow me to ask once again: Will the revered mister grant my request?” Mr. Black-White continued, his tone respectful and cautious.

Linghu Chong laughed inwardly. “He got the prison cells all mixed up and must have thought I am the Revered Mr. Ren. How careless of him!” But immediately after, he felt a chill in his heart. “Mr. Black-White obviously is the most meticulous one among the four Masters of the Plum Manor. It might be possible for Mr. Bald-Brush or Mr. Paint to mix up the prison cells, but how could Mr. Black-White actually make such a mistake? There must be a reason behind this.” With that in mind, he kept his silence.

Mr. Black-White continued, “Revered Mr. Ren, valiant and capable all your life, why let yourself languish with the decaying dust in the underground dungeon? My words are as firm as the mountain. If the revered mister grants me my request, I promise I will help the revered mister get out of this prison.”

Linghu Chong’s heart thumped wildly. Many thoughts raced through his mind, but he failed to put them in order. What was Mr. Black-White really after and why did he speak this way? He simply couldn’t figure it out. Then he heard Mr. Black-White asking a second time.

“Will the revered mister grant my request?”

Linghu Chong knew that this could be the very opportunity for him to escape. Despite any possible ill intentions, it would still have been a much better alternative than getting stranded forever in the underground prison for some unknown reasons. But having no way of identifying Mr. Black-White’s true intention, he bit his lip and remained

silent, afraid that he might say something wrong to ruin this precious opportunity.

“Revered Mr. Ren, why aren’t you speaking up?” Mr. Black-White heaved a sigh. “Last time, when that boy Feng challenged you in the art of sword, you didn’t mention a single word about my request in front of my three sworn-brothers. I am truly grateful for the kindness. I thought to myself, the sword fight must have brought back the many fond memories and the lofty sentiments in Revered Mr. Ren’s heart, and reminded him of the vast world outside. If your Excellency could break out of the dark dungeon, the entire world would be yours for the taking, and you can snuff out any mundane life at will, whether male or female, old or young; and no one would ever dare defy your wish. Wouldn’t that be exhilarating? Granting the request would not have brought any nuisance to your own. Why wouldn’t you ever consent in the past twelve years?”

Linghu Chong could sense the sincerity in his voice. Apparently he really thought he was addressing senior master Ren, which puzzled Linghu Chong even more. He listened on as Mr. Black-White begged again and again for him to agree to the request. Linghu Chong really wanted to know more details about the request, but he reckoned that the situation would take an immediate bad turn if he opened his mouth. Holding his tongue forcibly with great effort, he dared not make the slightest sound.

“If the revered mister is still so stubborn, I guess I’ll visit him again in two months,” Mr. Black-White concluded. He suddenly let out a few chuckles. “The revered mister didn’t scold me this time. Maybe there’s a favorable turn in the situation. I hope the revered mister will give my request some good consideration in the next two months.” After those words, he turned around to exit.

Linghu Chong became quite worried. It would be another two months before Mr. Black-White would return, and how could he stand another two months of the miserable life in



the pitch-black prison? He waited until Mr. Black-White had taken several steps and then spoke up in an intentionally lowered and coarse voice.

“What request shall I grant?”

Mr. Black-White turned around at once, and with a swift leap, he had returned back to the square-shaped opening.

“You will...you will grant me my request?” His voice trembled.

Linghu Chong turned to face the wall and covered his mouth with his hand.

“What request?” he said in a muffled voice.

“In the past twelve years, I would take on great risks to come here six times each year, just so that I could implore for the revered mister to consent. Why is the revered mister asking when the answer is so obvious?”

“I forgot!” Linghu Chong snorted.

“I would like the revered mister to teach me the secret of the magical art. Once I master the skills, I promise to let the revered mister out of this place.”

“Has he really mistaken me for that senior master Ren, or is this some kind of intrigue?” Linghu Chong pondered. Still having no clue about Mr. Black-White’s true intentions, he mumbled something indistinct, not even knowing what he said himself.

Naturally, Mr. Black-White didn’t understand a word of his, and had to ask again and again, “Will the revered mister grant it? Will the revered mister grant it?”

“You don’t live up to your promise. You won’t fool me,” Linghu Chong replied.

“What kind of guarantee would I have to provide so the revered mister will believe my words?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I understand the revered mister’s worries. What if I break my promise after the revered mister teaches me the secret of the magical art and still not let him out? There is no need to worry! I have it all arranged, and the revered mister

can put his trust in my arrangement," Mr. Black-White answered.

"What arrangement?"

"Does this mean the revered mister will grant me my request?" Mr. Black-White asked quickly, his voice filled with excitement.

Linghu Chong thought very quickly, "He wants me to teach him the secret of the magical art. Where the heck would I find this secret of the magical art? But I might as well check out his arrangement. If he really will let me out of this place, I could just give him those meditation techniques carved on the steel plate. Who cares if it works or not, it doesn't hurt to give him some false hope."

When Mr. Black-White didn't hear an answer, he added, "After the revered mister teaches me the magical art, I would have automatically become an apprentice of the revered mister. In our cult, an apprentice who deceives his master is to be skinned and dismembered alive. In the past several hundred years, not a single one had managed to get away from the harsh punishment. How would I ever dare to not let the revered mister out?"

"I see," Linghu Chong let out another snort. "Come back in three days to get your answer."

"Why won't the revered mister grant my request today? Why wait another three days in this dark dungeon?" Mr. Black-White pleaded.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, "He is even more impatient than I am. It might be a good idea to wait three days and see if he's going to pull some clever tricks." At that thought, he produced a loud, disgruntled humph as if he was very annoyed.

"Sure! Sure! I shall return in three days so I could ask advice from the revered mister again!" Mr. Black-White hurriedly agreed.

Linghu Chong listened as Mr. Black-White walked out of the underground tunnel and closed the iron gate while many

unsettling thoughts swirled inside his head.

“Could he really have mistaken me as the Ren-named senior master? He is a very meticulous man. How could he make such a silly mistake?”

Suddenly, an idea struck him. “Could it be possible that Mr. Huang-Zhong found out about Mr. Black-White’s visits and secretly moved senior master Ren to another cell, then put me in this cell instead? That’s got to be it! In the past twelve years, Mr. Black-White had been paying a visit every other month. It’s very likely that someone found out about it. It must have been Mr. Huang-Zhong who set up this scheme clandestinely.”

Then, he remembered what Mr. Black-White had said earlier. “In our cult, an apprentice who deceives his master is to be skinned and dismembered alive. In the past several hundred years, not a single one had managed to get away from the harsh punishment.”

“Our cult? Which cult?” he thought it over. “Could it be the Demon’s Cult? Is it possible that the senior master Ren and the Four Skunks of Jiangnan are all members of the Demon’s Cult? What kind of game are they playing? Why are they dragging me into this mess?”

As soon as the name “Demon’s Cult” came to his mind, he found the entire matter surreptitious and beyond his comprehension, and decided to not ponder upon it. Instead, he concentrated only on two things: “Was Mr. Black-White sincere or was he just acting it up? How shall I answer him when he comes back in three days?”

All kinds of strange idea went through his mind, but no matter how hard he tried, he still couldn’t figure out Mr. Black-White’s true intentions. After some time, he became extremely weary and fell asleep. By the time he woke up, his first thought was, “If brother Xiang were here, with his experience and knowledge, he would have guessed Mr. Black-White’s intention in no time. That Ren-named senior

master was also very bright, likely even smarter than brother Xiang...oops!"

He suddenly cried out and jumped to his feet. After the nap, his brain functioned much better and he realized something.

"For the last twelve years, senior master Ren never granted him the request. Why? Because he knew very well what would happen if he did. As sharp and experienced as he is, he clearly knew the pros and cons of the matter." Then he thought to himself, "Although senior master Ren should not grant the request, I am not senior master Ren. Why can't I?"

He knew he shouldn't do it. He could even smell the great danger involved, yet the hope of escape weighed heavily on his mind, and he would risk the greatest calamity just for an opportunity to break out from the dark underground dungeon. He soon made up his mind.

"When Mr. Black-White comes back in three days, I will consent to his request and teach him the inner strength cultivation and meditation techniques carved on the steel plate. Then I'll just act according to his reactions."

Having decided, he began tracing the handwritings on the steel plate and tried to memorize every word of it.

"I must completely memorize this thing, so that the formulas will simply bolt out when I teach him and he will never have any doubt about it. Only that my voice is too different from that of the senior master Ren. I'll really have to lower my voice. I've got an idea! I can shout at the top of my lungs for the next two days and dampen my voice. Then I'll also mumble when I speak, so it'll be hard for him to detect anything unusual."

In the next while, Linghu Chong would spend some time reading the formulas on the steel plate, and then spend the next moment shouting out loud. He knew that the dungeon was located deep underground, and with the many gates, even if he were to burn firecrackers in the cell, people outside would still not be able to hear anything. Crying at the

top of his lungs, he cursed the Four Skunks of Jiangnan for a good while and then began singing songs and theater opera. Eventually, even he, himself, couldn't withstand his own ugly singing. He burst out into loud laughter. Then he would go back to memorizing the formulas on the steel plate.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong came upon a few sentences: "Make Dan-Tian<sup>3</sup> an empty box and a deep valley. Empty box can store objects; deep valley is a reservoir for water. When inner energy flows through, distribute into the acupoints in the Ren Passage."

He had actually traced these sentences with his fingers a few times before, but since he detested all energy cultivation techniques in his mind, he never really thought about the meaning inside. Now when they caught his attention, he was very dumbfounded.

"When Master taught me inner strength cultivation, the main essentials were all about storing inner energy inside Dan-Tian. The more vigorous and dense the inner entry streams inside Dan-Tian, the stronger the inner strength. Why would this formula say that there should be no inner energy stored inside Dan-Tian? If inner energy cannot reside inside Dan-Tian, then where inner strength would be coming from? No inner strength cultivation methods out there will ever suggest something like this. Is this technique a joke? Ha-ha! Black-White is a wicked and despicable man. Why don't I pass this method on to him and make a fool out of him?"

He traced the handwritings on the steel plate and slowly pondered over the meaning. The first several hundred characters taught techniques on how to disperse one's own inner strength and energy. The more he read it, the more shocked he felt.

"Who in the world would be so stupid and willing to dissolve the inner energy he had once diligently cultivated over his entire life? Unless he was determined to end his life. But if he wanted a suicide, he could just easily slash his

throat with his own sword. Why make it so complicated? To dissolve inner energy this way is much more difficult than cultivating inner energy. Besides, what good does it do?"

He mulled over the matter some more and found himself in great depression.

"Once Black-White hears these formulas and techniques, he would know immediately that I am just messing with him. For sure he won't fall for it. I guess my plan is not going to work at all."

Linghu Chong became more and more annoyed as he recited the words again and again, "when there's inner energy steams inside Dan-Tian, distribute them into the Ren Passage, like a bamboo is empty inside, like a valley is always void...." Anger built up as he went on and eventually he gave a good smack at his bed and cursed loudly, "Damn it! This guy was angry for being stuck in the dungeon, so he decided to play tricks and make fun of other people."

He scolded for a while and then fell asleep again. In his sleep, his mind seemed to have started following the formulas on the steel plate and began the exercise. When he thought of the sentence "when there's inner energy steams inside Dan-Tian, distribute them into the Ren Passage," a stream of inner energy actually dispersed into his Ren Passage, and he felt ineffable comforts all over his body. This went on for a good while in his wooziness. Half-sleep and half-awake, Linghu Chong could feel the energy streams inside his Dan-Tian still flowing toward the Ren Passage. But all of a sudden, he realized what was going on.

"Oh, no! If my inner energy keeps flowing out like this, I'd turn into an invalid!"

Startled, he sat up hurriedly. The inner energy streams immediately flowed backward from the Ren Passage, and he found himself consumed by strong nausea and dizziness. After a long while, he was finally able to breathe normally. Then, a thought suddenly struck him and brought him a pleasant surprise.

“My inner injuries are so difficult to cure all because I have running wild inside me seven or eight heterogeneous inner energy streams from the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment. Even Dr. Ping One-Finger couldn’t cure me. Great Master Fang-Zheng, the abbot of the Shaolin Temple, said before that only the Tendon Altering Sutra of Shaolin would allow me to gradually tame and dissolve these heterogeneous inner energy streams. But aren’t these inner energy cultivation techniques carved on the steel plate teaching me exactly the same thing – how to dissolve the inner energy streams inside me? Ha-ha! Linghu Chong, you are such a fool! While others fear the loss of their inner energy, you actually fear that the inner energy wouldn’t go away. Now there’s this amazing method just perfect for my case. How wonderful!”

He knew that what happened was only because he dreamed what he thought. Because he recited the formulas again and again when he was awake, those meditation techniques and breathing exercises carved on the steel plate had occupied his entire mind. Once he fell asleep, his subconsciousness took over and simply started following suit involuntarily. However, since his mind was not focused in his dreams, he didn’t really follow the formulas letter to letter. Now, having figured out the great benefit, he found great inspiration. He carefully traced the carvings on the steel plate two more times and made sure he understood the true meanings before sitting down cross-legged in a meditation pose and beginning the energy cultivation step by step.

Only about two hours into the meditation, he could already sense a fraction of the heterogeneous energy streams, which had been stuck and getting wild in his Dan-Tian region for a long time, dispersing into his Ren Passage. Although he still couldn’t rid them out of his body, the pain and tension caused by those energy steams rolling over inside him had certainly been greatly reduced.

Great joy welled up in his heart and he couldn't help but jump to his feet and sing at the top of his lungs. He soon realized how ugly and hoarse the singing was. Turned out his previous day's screaming and shouting were very effective and had really done it for his voice.

"Ren Woxing! Ren Woxing! You had left these formulas behind with the intention to cause harm. You probably had no idea that one day I'd run into them and actually benefit instead of suffer from them! If you knew this, you'd probably turn over in your grave and cry! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" he thought to himself.

He continued working on dispersing energy steams without any break. The more he exercised, the more comfortable he felt. Then he thought.

"After I completely disperse the energy streams from the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment, I could very well start all over with our Huashan School's inner strength cultivation, following the instructions taught by Master. Although I'll have to start from scratch again, and it might take a lot of time and effort, chances are, my life probably would be safe now. If Brother Xiang eventually comes and rescues me out of here, there's a new life waiting for me out there in the martial world!"

Then he had a different thought, "Since Master had already banished me from the Huashan School, why bother practicing Huashan School's inner strength? There are plenty of inner strength cultivation methods from the many schools in the martial world. Why can't I study from Brother Xiang or even Ying-Ying?" Desolation and excitement entangled in his mind.

After eating the day's meal, he practiced the techniques again and felt a great sense of soothing in his entire body. Not able to contain his joy, he burst into hearty laughter. Then, Mr. Black-White's voice all of a sudden rose from outside of the prison door.



“How are you, revered mister? I have been humbly waiting outside for a good while!”

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. He had been concentrating so much on the energy cultivation and dispersion that he didn't even realize that three days had passed and that it was the day he told Mr. Black-White to come back. He didn't even notice Mr. Black-White's arrival. Luckily his voice was so coarse now that Mr. Black-White didn't find anything unusual. He quickly let out several hollow laughs as an acknowledgement.

“The revered mister seems to be in a pleasant mood today. Why not make it the day the revered mister receives a new apprentice?” Mr. Black-White suggested.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “If I agree to take him in as an apprentice and teach him these energy cultivation techniques, as soon as he opens the door and comes in, he'll notice that there's only Feng Er-Zhong, but no revered mister Ren. For sure he'll have a fall out immediately. Besides, even if it were the real revered mister Ren, once Mr. Black-White learns those techniques, he'll most likely manage to murder revered mister Ren, like poisoning the food or something. Right! It would be so easy for Black-White to murder me with poison. Why would he want to let me escape after he learns the secret formulas? No wonder revered mister Ren wouldn't ever agree to teach him the secret art in the last twelve years.”

“Once revered mister teaches me the magical art, the humble apprentice will show his respect by serving the revered mister great wine and tasty roast chicken,” not hearing a reply, Mr. Black-White immediately proposed.

Linghu Chong had been imprisoned for many days and was only given plain vegetables and tofu each day. As soon as he heard the words “great wine and tasty roast chicken,” his mouth drooled with greed. This was too tempting!

“Fine. Go get me some great wine and tasty chicken first. If they get me into a good mood, I might teach you

something.”

“Sure! Sure! I’ll bring back some great wine and tasty chicken. But I am afraid it won’t be today. If opportunity allows, I’ll bring them in tomorrow,” Mr. Black-White replied hurriedly.

“Why not today?” Linghu Chong asked.

“To get in here, I have to pass through my eldest sworn-brother’s bedroom. Only when he is away, I could...could....” Mr. Black-White explained, to which Linghu Chong let out a snort without saying another word.

Afraid that Mr. Huang-Zhong might return to his bedroom, Mr. Black-White dared not to stay any longer. He quickly said his goodbye and then went away.

“How can I trick Black-White into the prison cell and whack him?” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “This man is so crafty; it would be impossible to swindle him. Moreover, without a way to break these iron shackles and chains around my wrists and ankles, even if I succeed in killing Black-White, I would still be stuck here.”

With that thought, his right hand naturally reached for his left wrist and then pulled. This was only a spontaneous move, and he certainly didn’t expect the iron shackle to break open, but to his great surprise, the iron shackle did actually open. He gave it a few more hard pulls and even managed to free his left wrist from the shackle.

This was definitely not something Linghu Chong could foresee, and his heart thumped quickly from the mixed feeling of shock and delight. He examined the iron shackle with his finger and then found a slit in the middle of the ring. If he had not dispersed the inner energy streams inside him, any hard movement would have made him faint. Even with the slit in the middle of the shackle ring, he would not have been able to pull it open. Since he had been working on dispersing inner energy streams for over two days, the energy streams the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment had forcefully injected into his body have

been diffused into his Ren Passage, which in turn spontaneously originated strong inner force.

He felt the iron shackle on this right wrist. Sure enough, there was also a thin slit. He probably had felt the thin slit many times before, but never in his mind associated it with a crack in the shackle ring. He pulled hard with his left hand and freed his right hand from the shackle ring. Next he felt the two shackle rings around his ankles and also found thin slits in both. After some more hard pulling, he found himself breathless, covered in sweat, but completely free from all the shackles.

Once rid of the shackles, the iron chain no longer restrained him in anyway. He was truly puzzled: "Why is there a slit on each of the shackle ring? How could this kind of shackles have fettered anyone?"

The next day, when the deaf and mute old man delivered his food, Linghu Chong was able to actually look at the shackles closely. Next to each of the slits was a fine-grained saw pattern. Obviously someone had cut through the four shackles rings with a very thin steel wire saw. The slits shined under the dim light and there were no rust on the fractures. This meant that the cuts must have been made only recently.

"But why were these shackle rings closed again around my limbs?" Linghu Chong asked himself. "Someone must have tried to free me secretly. This underground dungeon is so well hidden; no one from the outside would be able to break in. Therefore, the secret rescuer must be someone inside the Plum Manor. Maybe he disliked the plot against me. That's why he secretly cut open my shackles with a steel wire saw while I lay unconsciously in the prison cell. He probably didn't want to openly declare himself an enemy of the Plum Manor, and he is still looking for an opportunity to help me escape." At the thought, his spirit was greatly lifted.

"The entrance to the underground tunnel is concealed underneath Mr. Huang-Zhong's bed in his bedroom. If it were Mr. Huang-Zhong who had wanted to rescue me, he could

have done it anytime. He didn't have to delay. Mr. Black-White obviously can't be the one. Out of Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint, Mr. Paint is a confidant in the art of wine and had good fellowship with me. I bet it must be Mr. Paint."

Then he remembered that Mr. Black-White would return the next day and thought about how he should cope with him. "I'll just gloss things over with him. Why can't I fool him with fake Kung Fu in exchange for some wine and meat?"

Then he thought, "Mr. Paint could come and rescue me any day now. I've gotta hurry and memorize all these formulas and techniques on the steel plate."

He traced the carved characters and then recited each word carefully. When he studied these characters before, he didn't pay very close attention, so memorizing everything with one hundred percent accuracy was no easy task. The handwritings on the steel plate were hasty and careless. With his limited education, he couldn't recognize some of the poorly written characters. So he forced himself to memorize the strokes of the character and then randomly picked characters with similar strokes as substitutes. He knew that formulas for first-class martial arts are serious matters. Even one incorrect character could mean difference between life and death, success and failure. Any slight misunderstanding could very well lead to fire-deviation. Once he got out of the prison, who knows when he'll be able to come back and reference the steel plate again? He must make sure he memorized everything with absolutely no errors.

So he read them again and again, losing count of how many times he had recited them, until he felt that he could even recite backward from the end to the beginning. Only by then, he felt at ease and allowed himself to fall asleep.

That night, in his dream, Linghu Chong actually saw Mr. Paint coming forth to open the prison cell door and let him out. The excitement woke him and then he realized it was only a fond dream. He didn't let that depress him.

“He hasn’t come to rescue me today only because he doesn’t have the right opportunity. He’ll certainly come to my rescue before long,” he thought to himself.

He figured that although the formulas and techniques carved on the steel plate were very beneficial to him, they could be extremely harmful to others. If someone else gets locked up in this dark prison cell again in the future, that someone must have been a good person, and he wouldn’t let that person fall for Ren Woxing’s scheme. With that in mind, he traced the handwritings and recited the entire thing for another ten times or so, and then scraped off over a dozen characters in the passage from the steel plate using the iron shackles he freed himself from.

Mr. Black-White didn’t show up that day, but Linghu Chong didn’t care much about it. Instead, he continued cultivating his internal energy streams according to the formulas and methods on the steel plate. For the next several days, Mr. Black-White never came. Linghu Chong could tell that he had made great improvement in his training. Over sixty percent of the heterogeneous energy steams left inside him by the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment had been successfully dispersed out from his Dan-Tian and into his various Ren and Du Passages. He was sure that all of them could be dispersed out if he persevered.

Each day, he would recite the formulas scores of times and then scrape off a dozen or so characters from the steel plate. He noticed a gradual increase in his strength, and it became easier and easier to scrape the steel plate with the iron shackles. Another month went by in this manner. Although he lived deep underground, he could still sense a gradual decrease of the sweltering summer temperature.

“This must have been the work of divine providence. If I had been imprisoned here during winter, I would never have found the handwritings on the steel plate. Who knows? Perhaps before summer hits, Mr. Paint would have already had me rescued.”

At that moment, he suddenly heard the sound of Mr. Black-White's footsteps from the outside tunnel.

Linghu Chong was lying in bed. He quickly turned around with his face toward the inside of the cell. Then he heard Mr. Black-White stopping outside of the prison door and spoke apologetically.

"Revered...revered mister Ren! I am truly very sorry for not having come sooner! In the past month, my eldest sworn-brother never set foot outside. Every day I anxiously awaited the opportunity to come and pay the revered mister my respect, but that opportunity only presented itself today. I hope the revered mister...the revered mister do not take any offense!"

Together with Mr. Black-White's voice, a wonderful aroma of wine and roast chicken also came in through the square-shaped opening on the prison door. It had been many days since Linghu Chong last tasted any drop of wine. As soon as the smell of the wine hit his nose, he could no longer hold his patience and quickly turned around.

"Give me the wine and chicken!" he demanded.

"Sure! Sure! So the revered mister has agreed to teach me the secret formulas of the divine art?" Mr. Black-White asked.

"Bring me three catties<sup>4</sup> of wine and a whole chicken each time, and I'll teach you four segments of the secret formulas. Once I've had three thousand catties of wine and one thousand whole chickens, you can probably get all the formulas by then."

"I am afraid this arrangement might be too slow and cause unnecessary problems. How about I bring six catties of wine and two whole chickens each time so the revered mister can teach me eight segments of the secret formulas?" Mr. Black-White bargained.

"You are certainly greedy!" Linghu Chong said with a grin. "Fine! Come on! Give those to me!"

Mr. Black-White handed over a wooden tray through the square-shaped opening, upon which were a large kettle of wine and a fat roast chicken.

Linghu Chong thought, "I am sure you won't kill me with poison before I teach you the secret formulas." So he picked up the wine kettle and quickly gulped down mouthful of wine. The wine was not in any way spectacular, but in his mind it tasted so good that even Mr. Paint's Turfan Grape-Wine of four cycles of distillation and ferments was no match for it. Without any stop for breath, he quickly poured half kettle of wine down his throat, and then tore a chicken leg off and shoved it into his mouth. Not very long after, he had already emptied the wine kettle and picked the chicken clean. Giving a satisfied pat to his belly, he declared approvingly.

"Excellent wine! Excellent wine!"

Mr. Black-White let out a big smile. "Now that the revered mister has enjoyed the tasty chicken and great wine, will the revered mister start the teaching please?"

Linghu Chong noticed that Mr. Black-White no longer mentioned anything with regard to the proposed Master-Apprentice relationship and ceremony. "He probably thought I was too busy drinking wine and eating chicken, and I'd completely forgotten about it," Linghu Chong thought. So he didn't mention it either.

"Okay. Here are the four segments. You'd better remember them well. 'Inside the unique channels and eight passages, there exist inner energy streams. Gather them in your Dan-Tian. Join them in your Dan-Zhong<sup>5</sup>.' Do you understand?"

The original text on the steel plate actually read, "Inner energy streams inside Dan-Tian, disperse them into four limbs. Inner strengths inside Dan-Zhong, dissolve them into the eight passages." Linghu Chong actually deliberately reversed the meaning in his teaching. When Mr. Black-White heard these, he found them to be just as plain as any

ordinary inner energy cultivation methods out there, so he quickly replied.

“I got these four segments. Will the revered mister please teach me the next four segments?”

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “After I made the changes, those four segments sounded quite ordinary. Naturally he wanted something more unique. I must find four peculiar segments to give him a good scare!” So he said, “Since today is the first day, I might as well teach you four more. Remember these: ‘Split Yang-Wei Passage with shock. Shut down Yin-Qiao Passage with clog. Once all Eight Passages are broken, the Divine Art will succeed.

Mr. Black-White was stupefied.

“If...if...one’s unique channel and eight passages are broken, how could he stay alive? These...these four segments are really beyond my understanding!”

“Do you expect just any ordinary person to understand such powerful divine art easily? If so, what would be so unique about it? Of course there are many profound and subtle theories in the divine art so no ordinary person could have understood them,” Linghu Chong said with a snort.

As Mr. Black-White listened on, he became more and more suspicious. The manner of speaking and the phrases the “revered mister” used seemed to be quite different from the Ren-named person he had known. In the first two meetings, Linghu Chong had only spoken very few words and also muffled his voice. This time, since Linghu Chong was quite high in spirit after he drank a good deal of wine, he spoke a lot more. Mr. Black-White was a very scrupulous man and these unusual signs quickly brought suspicion to his mind – the “revered mister” must be making up formulas to make fun of him.

“You said, ‘Once all Eight Passages are broken, the Divine Art will succeed.’ Are the unique channel and eight passages of the revered mister all really broken?” he demanded.

“That’s of course,” Linghu Chong acknowledged.



From the tone of Mr. Black-White's voice, he could sense suspicion developing and building, and he dared not to speak too much. So he quickly concluded.

"That's all. Comprehend well and you'll understand."

After these words, he set the wine kettle back down on the wooden tray and then handed the tray back through the square-shaped opening. Mr. Black-White reached forward to receive the tray, but all of a sudden, Linghu Chong let out a cry and then fell forward. A loud clank echoed as his forehead banged against the iron door.

"Why!" Mr. Black-White uttered. People in his caliber with extraordinary Kung Fu skills always had very quick reflexes. In no time he had reached his hands forward through the square-shaped opening and grabbed hold of the wooden tray, making sure the wine kettle would not fall and smash on the ground. At that split second, Linghu Chong turned his left hand swiftly and grabbed onto Mr. Black-White's right wrist.

"Black-White! Do you know who I am?" He grinned.

Mr. Black-White was astounded! "You...You...," his voice trembled.

At the time when Linghu Chong was handing the wooden tray out, the idea of grabbing Mr. Black-White's wrist hadn't crossed his mind. However, when he saw Mr. Black-White's palms moved under the dim light of the oil lamp, ready to receive the wooden tray from him, an insuppressible urge all of a sudden overwhelmed his heart. It was all because of this person's sly and calculated tricks that resulted in his many days of imprisonment. If he could break Mr. Black-White's wrist, it would be a great way to vent some of his anger and hatred. Besides, this out of the blue seize of his wrist would definitely give him a good fright. For such a treacherous man, such a fright was the least punishment he could think of. He wasn't even sure if it was the feeling of revenge or his childlike mischievous nature that led to the fake fall, which

tricked Mr. Black-White into reaching his hands in, which in turn made the grabbing successful.

Mr. Black-White had always been vigilant, but this attack came so sudden and abrupt without any prior signs of warning. By the time he sensed something was not right, his wrist had already fallen into Linghu Chong's grip. The grip was so strong that, to him, Linghu Chong's fingers almost felt like an iron claw and clasped firmly onto the Inner-Pass and Outer-Pass acupoints in his wrist.

Without thinking, Mr. Black-White reflectively rotated his right wrist and executed an anti-grappling stance. A loud clank echoed when three toes of his right foot suddenly broke, and he cried out loud in painful groans.

How did Mr. Black-White end up breaking his toes on his left foot when his right wrist was been held? How strange? Turned out that Mr. Black-White always had great fear of the "revered mister." As soon as his wrist fell into the grip, he desperately feared for his life, and in a rush, used a move named "Flood Dragon Rising above the Deep Pool." This move worked particularly well when one's wrist fell into the enemy's grip by quickly pulling the arm inward while swiftly and unexpectedly kicking outward with one's left foot. Such a powerful and fierce kick would land squarely on the enemy's chest. The enemy would usually end up spitting blood from severe internal injuries. If the enemy were also a skilled Kung Fu master, he would have easily chosen to let go of his wrist in avoidance. Otherwise, he would have no way of dodging the kick right to the chest. Unfortunately, in the moment of extreme distress, eager to break free, Mr. Black-White completely forgot about the thick iron door right between him and his opponent. He had executed the move "Flood Dragon Rising above the Deep Pool" perfectly, and the kick had also been very accurate, powerful and fierce. Sadly, he kicked right into the iron door and the only positive effect was a loud echoing bang.

Only when Linghu Chong heard the loud bang did he realize how lucky he had been. If it weren't because of the protection provided by the iron door, there was no way he could have escaped Mr. Black-White's extremely formidable kick. He couldn't help but burst into loud laughter.

"Kick again! If you kick as hard as the first time, I might just let you go," he said sarcastically.

Mr. Black-White suddenly felt his inner energy gushing out continuously through the Inner-Pass and the Outer-Pass acupoints on his right wrist, and could not but remember the one thing he feared the most his entire life. Instantly, he was scared out of his wits! He tried his best to slow down the inner energy loss and at the same time begged in sorrow.

"Revered...revered mister, I beg...you...."

As soon as he spoke, his inner energy gushed out in even larger waves. He had no choice but to stop speaking. But the inner energy just kept flowing out of him rapidly.

Ever since Linghu Chong started practicing the Kung Fu techniques carved on the steel plate, his Dan-Tian region felt like a bamboo that was empty inside and a valley that was always void. At the moment when he felt some inner energy appearing in his Dan-Tian, he didn't pay much attention to it. Instead, he noticed that Mr. Black-White's wrist quivered continuously as though he had seen something terrifying. Since he had great grudges against Mr. Black-White, he decided to give him a good scare. So he yelled loudly.

"After I teach you the secret art, you have become an apprentice of mine. You have been caught deceiving your master. Shouldn't I punish you for your crime?"

Mr. Black-White could feel that the inner energy inside him was rushing out even faster now. If he tried hard to hold his breath, the gushing could be temporarily stopped. But he simply had to breathe once a while, and in between the exhaling and inhaling, great amount of his inner energy would continue to flow out. At the moment he had completely forgotten about the pain from his injured toes. He

only wished to be able to free his right hand out of the square-shaped opening. Even if he had to lose an arm or an leg, he would have no complaints. At that thought, he immediately reached for his sword by the waist. As soon as made the move, two large gaps seemed to have opened up at the Inner-Pass and Outer-Pass acupoints by his wrist, and all the inner energy from his entire body spurted out like river water bursting through dikes, and impossible to stop the flow ever again.

Mr. Black-White knew if this continued for another while, all his internal energy would be eventually sucked dry. Gritting his teeth, he finally managed to draw his sword out of its sheath. Raising the sword high, he wanted to swing the sword down to chop off his own arm, but this movement only caused even larger streams of inner energy surging out of him. A loud ring resonated in his ears and he fainted.

Linghu Chong had only planned to scare Mr. Black-White when he grabbed onto the man's wrist. At most he was only going to twist and break Mr. Black-White's wrist to vent his anger. He certainly did not expect Mr. Black-White to panic so much and faint as if having been scared out of his wits. Laughing out loud, Linghu Chong let go of the wrist, and as soon as he did that, Mr. Black-White's torso collapsed and his right hand retracted backward from the square-shaped opening.

Suddenly, an idea shot up Linghu Chong's mind and he quickly reached for the sliding hand. Luckily he was quick with his move and caught the palm in time.

"Why don't I shackle him with the steel chains as a hostage, so I can coerce Mr. Huang-Zhong to let me go?" he thought.

He pulled Mr. Black-White's wrist hard to get it closer. Unexpectedly, as he gave the strong pull, Mr. Black-White's head actually came in also through the square-shaped opening, and then his entire body followed.

Linghu Chong did not see this coming. After a brief shock, he couldn't help but scold himself for how stupid he was. The square opening was roughly a foot wide, big enough to put a head through. And if one's head can go through it, so can the body. If Mr. Black-White can be pulled in, why couldn't he get out the same way? It would have been impossible for him to escape previously when his hands and feet were shackled in steel chains. But the shackle rings had been sawed through by someone secretly some time ago. Why didn't he escape?

"After Mr. Paint secretly sawed through the shackles around my hands and feet, day after day, he must have hoped that I'd escape the prison following that old man who delivered my food. He must have been extremely anxious by now!" he thought to himself.

At the time when Linghu Chong had found out about the sawed-through shackle rings, he had been right in the middle of learning those inner energy cultivation techniques and had focused all his attention to the training. Also he had not memorized all the formulas on the steel plate, so subconsciously he didn't really want to leave the prison cell. Therefore, the thought of running away by himself never even occurred to him.

Linghu Chong pondered for a second and then came to a decision. He hurriedly removed Mr. Black-White's robe and his own and then swapped them. He even put Mr. Black-White's black cloth mask over his own head, thinking, "Even if I bump into someone on my way out, they'll think I am Mr. Black-White."

Next, he hung Mr. Black-White's sword by his own waist. With the sword right next to his hand, his spirit soured immensely. Then he cuffed Mr. Black-White's hands and feet with the steel shackles and then pinched forcefully. The shackle rings were so tight that they even cut into flesh.

The severe pain woke Mr. Black-White, and he groaned, "Revered...revered mister Ren...your...your Magical Art of

Essence Absorbing....”

Linghu Chong had heard of the term “Magical Art of Essence Absorbing” before when he fought alongside Xiang Wentian in the remote wilderness. Someone in the crowd had shouted out this term. Now hearing the term again from Mr. Black-White, he couldn’t resist but ask, “What Magical Art of Essence Absorbing?”

“I...I...am...damn...damned...,” Mr. Black-White moaned.

Linghu Chong was in a rush to finally get out of the dungeon. He didn’t pay any more attention to Mr. Black-White. Sticking his head out from the square-shaped opening and also extending his arms out, he pushed gently on the iron door. His body shot out swiftly and he landed on the ground without a stagger. He felt a great amount of inner energy depositing inside his Dan-Tian region once again, which made him quite uncomfortable. He had no idea that the inner energy streams were actually absorbed from Mr. Black-White, and only concluded that the energy streams from Peach Valley’s Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment had returned to Dan Tian because he hadn’t practiced his energy cultivation techniques for a while. He decided to not worry too much about that and focus on how to get out of the dark dungeon as soon as possible, so he picked up the oil lamp Mr. Black-White had left outside and began following the tunnel out.

All the gates in the tunnel were left unlocked. He figured that Mr. Black-White must have decided to lock them on his way out. This made his escape so much easier. As he stepped through the many solid gates one after another, the many days of life in the dark underground prison suddenly felt as though they had occurred in a different lifetime. Strangely, his resentment toward Mr. Huang-Zhong and the bunch also seemed to have significantly lessened. All he could think of was the sweet smell of freedom, and everything else in the world no longer mattered to him.

At the end of the tunnel, he followed the steps upward until he was directly under an iron plate. He listened carefully but didn't hear anything from the outside. This underground imprisonment experience had taught him to be more careful and cautious, so he didn't rush out immediately, and instead, waited a good while underneath the iron plate and made sure there was no sound from the outside. By then he felt certain that Mr. Hung-Zhong was indeed not in his bedroom. Lifting up the iron plate gently, he climbed up and then leapt out from the hole in the bed. After carefully returning the iron plate to its original position and pulling the bamboo bedding sheet to cover it up, he treaded softly on tiptoe toward the door way. Then all of a sudden, someone spoke behind him in a gloomy voice.

"Second brother, what are you doing?"

Startled, Linghu Chong turned around and then saw Mr. Huang-Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint completely surrounding him, each wielding his weapon in hand. He didn't know that the entrance was equipped with secret trapping devices, and his breaking out had triggered the alarm and attracted Mr. Huang-Zhong and the others. Because he had a black mask on and was also wearing Mr. Black-White's robe, no one had recognized his true identity.

Greatly frightened, Linghu Chong could only stutter, "I... I...."

"I what?" Mr. Huang-Zhong demanded in an icy-cold voice. "I had a feeling that you were up to something. You went down the dungeon and asked Ren Woxing to teach you the Evil Art of Essence Absorbing, didn't you? Humph! Do you still remember what vow you pledged all those years ago?"

Linghu Chong found himself quite muddle-headed, not able to decide on whether to reveal his true identity or to keep pretending as Mr. Black-White. After a short hesitation, he drew the long sword by his waist and thrust it toward Mr. Bald-Brush.

“Good second brother! You really want to fight us?” Mr. Bald-Brush bellowed as he raised his brush to ward off the sword.

Linghu Chong’s sword thrust was only a fake. Seeing Mr. Bald-Brush’s attempt to block his attack, he quickly turned around and dashed out of the room. Mr. Huang-Zhong and the rest immediately chased after him. Running with all his might, Linghu Chong reached the front hall in no time.

“Second brother! Second brother! Where are you going?” Mr. Huang-Zhong shouted from behind.

Linghu Chong didn’t answer and kept on running full speed. He suddenly spotted a man standing in the middle of the front gate right in his path.

“Second Master, please stop!” the man uttered.

Since Linghu Chong was in such a hurry, he failed to slow down and ran right into the man. The collision sent the man flying in the air and landed almost thirty feet outside of the gate.

Linghu Chong threw a quick side glance and then recognized the man. It was “Straight Line Lightning Sword” Ding Jian, who, at this very moment, lay straight and stiff on the ground. His body position indeed resembled part of his nickname “Straight Line;” however, it had no relation whatsoever with the other part “Lightning Sword.”

Linghu Chong dashed along a small road nonstop. Mr. Huang-Zhong and the others stopped at the gate of the manor and gave up the chase. Only Mr. Paint continued shouting out loud.

“Second brother! Second brother! Come back! We brothers can always talk things through....”

Linghu Chong intentionally picked desolated small roads to follow and eventually arrived at an uninhabited wilderness, a place obviously quite a distance away from the city of Hangzhou. Although he had been running continuously at his top speed, when he stopped, he wasn’t tired at all and wasn’t even out of breath. It seemed as



though his stamina was even better than the time before he got injured.

He took off the cloth mask and then heard the sound of gurgling water. Feeling very thirsty, he traced the sound and soon found a small creek. He squatted down and then leaned forward so he could scoop some water to his mouth when he suddenly saw a man's face in the reflection of the creek water. The face was covered in filth, and with the disheveled hair it looked very odd and ugly. Linghu Chong was briefly startled, and then he couldn't help but grin. Anyone who got locked up for several months and never bathed would look this filthy. He all of a sudden felt his body itching all over. He quickly removed his robe and jumped into the creek for a good deep cleansing, thinking, "the filth on my body must have weighed more than thirty catties."

After he had thoroughly cleaned himself and also had a stomach full of clear water, he tied his long hair on top of his head. Checking in the water reflection, he found the familiar face again, a face that had no resemblance to that swollen face of the Feng Er-Zhong. As he was putting the robe back on, he felt some discomfort and blockage between his chest and stomach, so he sat down and meditated for a while using the newly learned inner energy cultivation techniques. Soon he could feel that the inner energy streams inside his Dan-Tian had been successfully dispersed into his unique channel and eight passages. The Dan-Tian region was once again like a bamboo that was empty inside or a valley that was always void. His entire body seemed to be vigorous and he also felt a soothing feeling of carefree beyond words. He didn't realize that he had mastered one of the best martial arts in the entire world. The seven streams of inner energy from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment, together with the inner energy streams infused into him by Great Master Fang-Sheng when he was treated at the Shaolin Temple, had all been transformed into his own. And when he gripped onto Mr. Black-White's wrist, he had also absorbed

into his Dan-Tian the entire load of inner energy Mr. Black-White had cultivated for his entire life. Once he dispersed those into his unique channel and eight passages, he had gained the inner strength of another superior master. Naturally he would feel utterly vigorous.

He leapt up, drew the long sword by his waist, and leisurely thrust it toward the hanging branch of a green willow by the side of the creek, whisking his wrist gently as he thrust out. The blade whistled as it cut through the thin air and then swiftly returned to the sheath before he landed smoothly on his left foot. Lifting his head, he watched as five leaves slowly drifted down in the air. The long sword cleared its sheath for a second time and made an arcing slash, catching all five leaves on the side of the blade. He picked up one of the willow leaves from the side of the blade with his left hand as a mixed feeling quickly submerged his heart. It was a mixture of joy and disbelief. He stood silently by the creek, and all of a sudden, found deep grieve in his heart.

"The superior Kung Fu I have right now would not have been possible from Master and Master-Wife's teaching. But I would rather everything was the way it was as before, when my inner strength and my sword art were equally futile, when I could live a carefree life inside the Huashan School, spending time with little apprentice sister from morning till dusk, instead of wandering the martial world alone like a loitering ghost."

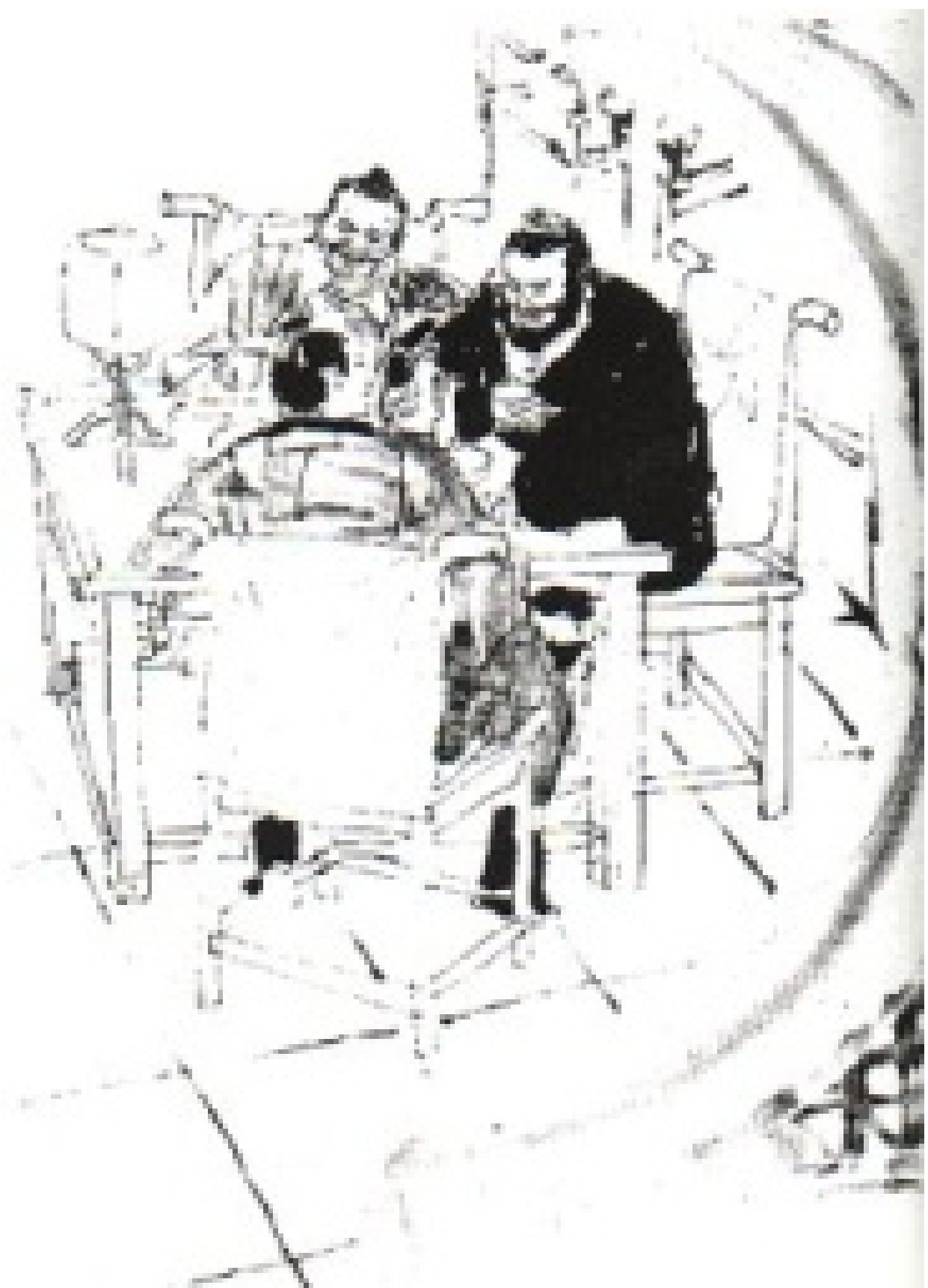
His martial arts skills had reached the most superior level, but at the mean time, he had never felt so lonely and desolate in his entire life. All his life he'd enjoyed lively crowds, bosom friends, and tasty wines. In the past several months since he was locked away in the underground dungeon, he had no choice but to be alone. Now that his body had finally break free, but his mind was just as lonely. Standing next to the gurgling creek all by himself, the feeling of joy gradually waned away. The cold moon casted

his lonely shadow on the ground as the gentle breeze brushed his body, filling his heart with boundless despair.

# **Chapter 22: Out of Trouble**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**



**Ren Woxing picked up the wine kettle and filled a cup with wine. "It's fate that have brought us here together." Said he, "If you agree with my suggestion, then please drink up this cup of wine.**

Linghu Chong sadly stood still for a long time until the moon was directly above his head. The night was still and he pondered over the events that occurred at the Plum Manor. He decided to go back to the manor to understand what had happened and also to rescue senior Ren if he was not a bad person.

Having finally decided on this course of action, he started his journey back to the Plum Manor. He went up Mount Gu and approached the Plum Manor through the forest surrounding it. He listened for sounds inside the manor and after awhile, having heard no sound, he lightly jumped over the fence onto the manor's ground. All the ten or more rooms inside the manor were shrouded in darkness. However, there was one window on his right with lights from inside the room. He silently walked across the ground and crouched underneath that window. From inside the room, he heard the voice of a person.

The voice sounded very strict. "Mr. Huang Zhong, do you know your crime?"

Linghu Chong was surprised. He wondered what Mr. Huang Zhong's position was in this manor when there was someone who could actually use this kind of tone when speaking to him. He peered inside the room from a crack in the window and was able to see four people sitting in a row. Three of these are men around fifty to sixty years old while the other one is a middle aged woman. They were all wearing black robes with a yellow belt tied around their waists. Mr. Huang Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint were standing in front of them with their backs to the window. From this, Linghu Chong could tell that those people sitting have higher rank than them.

"Yes, your subordinate knows his crime. On the elders' arrival, we didn't go far to welcome you. Very guilty, very guilty," Linghu Chong heard Mr. Huang Zhong's reply.

"Hmm, not going far to welcome us, is this a crime? Where's Black-White? Why doesn't he come out to see me?" the gentleman sitting in the middle coldly asked.

Linghu Chong laughed inside, "Mr. Black-White has been imprisoned by me inside the underground prison, but Mr. Huang Zhong and the rest of them thought that he has run away from the manor." He also thought, "What elder? What subordinate? They all must be people from the devil cult."

"Four elders, your subordinate has not been strict enough. Mr. Black-White's temperament is strange and recently he has been acting like his former self. In the last few days, he has unexpectedly disappeared from the manor," Mr. Huang Zhong replied.

This elder's eye flashed and stared at Mr. Huang Zhong.

"Mr. Huang Zhong, Chief ordered you four to guard the Plum Manor. However, from what we heard, you've been playing zither, drinking wine, drawing and playing go. Is this true?" the elder coldly asked.

"We four subordinates have accepted Chief's order to stay here and guard the traitor," Mr. Huang Zhong replied while bowing.

"That is correct. How's that traitor doing?" the elder asked.

"We can report to the elder that the traitor is still being held inside the underground prison. Over the last twelve years, subordinate has never stepped foot outside the Plum Manor. We do not dare to relax our guard," Mr. Huang Zhong reported.

"Very good, very good. You never stepped foot outside the Plum Manor and do not dare to relax your guard. So for sure that traitor is still being held inside the underground prison?" the elder questioned.

"That's true," Mr. Huang Zhong replied.

Suddenly, that elder lifted his head and laughed loudly facing the roof. The dust from the ceiling was seen falling around the room.

"Very good! Bring that traitor here for us to look at," shouted the elder.

"Four elders, please forgive us. Chief's strict order was not to let anyone visit the traitor except for Chief himself. We don't dare," replied Mr. Huang Zhong.

The elder took out something from inside his robe and lifted the object he took out high above his head. The other three elders stood up immediately as well, looking at the object reverently. Linghu Chong squinted his eye trying to look at the object. It was a half-foot high dried up black wood. On top of the object was some kind of flowery patterns carved on it which looked completely strange to Linghu Chong.

Seeing this object, Mr. Huang Zhong and the rest of the people in the room bowed towards the object.

"Chief's Black Command Wood is here, it's as if Chief himself is here, subordinate is ready to receive order," Mr. Huang Zhong said.

"Good, bring that traitor here!" commanded the elder.

"That traitor's hands and feet are bound in metal chains. We can't.... we can't bring him up here," said Mr. Huang Zhong hesitantly.

"Even until this moment, you still refuse to bring him here. I ask you, has that traitor escaped?" the elder asked coldly.

"That traitor... that traitor has escaped? Im.. impossible. That person is still locked away in the underground prison. I have just seen him recently with my own eyes. How... how can he have escaped?" Mr. Huang Zhong answered in fright.

"Oh, so he's still in the underground prison. I've wronged you. Please forgive me," the elder spoke warmly with a softened expression.



Then, the elder stood up and slowly approached Mr. Huang Zhong. It looked like that he was going to apologise to the three masters of the Plum Manor. But he suddenly extended one hand to pat Mr. Huang Zhong's shoulder. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint simultaneously retreated two steps in a hurry. Although their movements were really fast, that elder's hand moved even faster. Two sounds "bang, bang" can be heard as both of Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint's right shoulders were hit. As he carried out this sneak attack, the elder was still showing a smile on his face. Actually, even with Mr. Huang Zhong's skill in Jiang Hu, he had no chance of avoiding this sneak attack. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint's skills were inferior, so even if they were aware of the attack, they had no chance of escaping the strikes.

"Elder Bao, what sin have we committed? Why do you use such a vicious method to deal with us?" said Mr. Paint loudly. He sounded both injured and angry.

"Chief ordered you to guard the traitor here. But you've let that traitor escaped. Don't you think you deserve to die?" the smirking Elder Bao said slowly.

"If that traitor has really escaped, then subordinate deserves to die. But he's still being held in the underground prison. Elder Bao, you're too vicious, we brothers cannot accept this," replied Mr. Huang Zhong indignantly, as he was leaning slightly to one side.

Linghu Chong outside the window could see Mr. Huang Zhong sweating profusely. He thought that Elder Bao's palm strike was very good as he managed to subdue Mr. Huang Zhong, whose kung fu was already powerful, using only one palm. However, he also thought that Mr. Huang Zhong's kung fu could not be inferior to Elder Bao's. If not for Elder Bao's sneak attack, Mr. Huang Zhong may not have lost.

"Go to the underground prison and have a look. If that traitor is still in there, I... humph... I, Bao Dachu, will give you three kowtows to apologise. Naturally, I will also immediately forgive you from this sin," said Elder Bao.

"Ok, four elders please wait here," said Mr. Huang Zhong.

Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint immediately went out of the room to follow Mr. Huang Zhong. Linghu Chong trembled as he saw these three people walking away from the room. He thought that he shivered because of the injuries still affecting him. But it was merely because he was excited from watching all the things happening right in front of his eyes.

Fearing the four people inside the room detecting him, he didn't dare to look inside again and slowly sat down on the ground.

"The Chief they're talking about must be the current world's number one Dongfang Bubai. He assigned the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan to guard this traitor and they've been at it for 12 years now. Of course the traitor they're talking about isn't me then. It must be that senior Ren. And he has managed to escape without Mr. Huang Zhong and other's knowledge. Wow, this senior Ren is really resourceful. That's right! They all really didn't know that senior Ren has escaped. Otherwise, Mr. Black-White wouldn't have mistaken me for senior Ren," thought Linghu Chong.

Thinking that once Mr. Huang Zhong and his brothers entered the underground prison and recognised Mr. Black-White, things will get very complicated for them; Linghu Chong felt wonderful and very happy.

"Why did they also imprison me in the underground prison? All I did was to compare sword art against senior Ren. They must've been afraid that I would leak their secret out, so they locked me up in there too. Humph, this is called eliminating a potential informant without murder. But eliminating a potential informant in this way is just the same as murder. This time, they would be the ones to suffer difficulties. See how they like it. This will repay for the wrong that they did to me," thought Linghu Chong indignantly.

Linghu Chong heard the four people inside the room sat back down without saying a single word. He didn't dare to breathe loudly. Even though there's a wall that separate him

with the four people in the room, the distance between them is only around 10 feet. He only had to breathe slightly heavily and they'd be able to detect him immediately.

Suddenly, a cry of "ah" could be heard in the still and quiet night. It sounded full of pain and dread. Whoever heard it could not help but feel absolutely terrified. When Linghu Chong recognised that it was Mr. Black-White's voice, he felt sorry for him. However, this Mr. Black-White had plotted his own demise, it could be said that the consequences matched his own action. But now that he has fallen on Elder Bao's hand, this is even more unfortunate for Mr. Black-White.

He could hear their steps coming closer. Then, he heard Mr. Huang Zhong and his brothers entering the room. Linghu Chong edged closer to the window's crack to take a look inside the room. Inside, he could see Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint carrying Mr. Black-White. Mr. Black-White's face was pale and his eyes lacked any spirit. The atmosphere inside the room was completely different than before.

"Report... Reporting to the Four Elders. That traitor has... has escaped. Subordinate is ready to receive death," said Mr. Huang Zhong while bowing down.

He looked like he already knew what his fate would be. His speech was calm and collected, unlike before.

"You said that Black-White is not in the manor, how come he's here now? How can it be?" calmly replied Bao Dachu.

"All sorts of reasons. Actually subordinate is really confused. Ai, all because we four subordinates are too engrossed in the arts and has let other people looked at our weaknesses. And they have managed to take away that traitor from right under our noses," replied Mr. Huang Zhong.

"We four people have received Chief's order to come here and verify that the traitor has escaped. It seems that you have reported truthfully now and is not trying to deceive us anymore. Then... then, maybe we can plead mercy to Chief on your behalf," said Bao Dachu.

Mr. Huang Zhong sighed and said, "Even considering Chief's mercy and the four elders' compassions, how can we, subordinates, still live in this world with all this shame? The whole event is very complicated, subordinate doesn't understand the true story. Even after we've died, we won't be content. Elder Bao, is Chief... is Chief in Hangzhou city at the moment?"

"Who said Chief is in Hangzhou city?"

"That traitor has just escaped yesterday, how did Chief know about this so fast and sent four elders to Plum Manor immediately?"

"Humph... you're becoming more and more stupid. Who said that traitor escaped yesterday?"

"That person really escaped yesterday at noon. At that time, we three people thought that person was Mr. Black-White. We didn't know that he had switched places with Mr. Black-White. He was wearing Mr. Black-White's robe when he escaped. In this matter, we three brothers... four brothers are certain. Also, there's still Ding Jian, who that traitor knocked down, and got several of his ribs broken..." Mr. Huang Zhong said assuredly.

Bao Dachu turned his head to look at the other three elders.

"This person is talking nonsense. I don't know what he's talking about," scowled Elder Bao.

"We received the message last month on the 14th..." A fat and short elder said while calculating with his fingers. "This is the 17th day."

Mr. Huang Zhong fiercely withdrew two steps and hit the wall with a "bang".

"No... This can't be! We're really certain. We saw him escaped yesterday with our own eyes."

Mr. Huang Zhong walked to the door and shouted "Shi Lingwei, bring Ding Jian here!"

"Yes!" Shi Lingwei replied from somewhere distant.

Bao Dachu walked up to Mr. Black-White, grabbed his chest, and lifted him up. Mr. Black-White's hands and feet were dangling down. It seemed that all the bones in his body had been broken. His body looked like a sack of leather.

Bao Dachu lost all colour from his face as if he was scared to death. He quickly let go of Mr. Black-White's body, which crumpled to the ground.

"Correct, this is that bastard's ... that bastard's Art of Essence Absorbing. It can absorb the whole body's energy clean," said a tall and strong looking elder, his voice quivering and looking completely scared.

"When did you get in his way?" Bao Dachu asked Mr. Black-White.

"It... It... was yesterday. That bastard... that bastard grabbed my right wrist. I... I couldn't move at all. He controlled me completely," answered Mr. Black-White.

Bao Dachu looked completely baffled. His face muscle twitched slightly and his eyes looked bewildered.

"And after that?"

"He then pulled me through the hole in the iron gate, removed my robe and wore it. Then he shackled my hands and feet with the steel chains. He then escaped... escaped through that hole."

Bao Dachu scowled and asked, "Yesterday? How can it be yesterday?"

"The shackles for the hands and feet were made out of steel. How did he break them?" asked the fat and short looking elder.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Black-White.

"Subordinate examined the shackles and found that they were sawed through by a fine steel saw. I don't know where this bastard got the saw from," said Mr. Bald-Brush.

After Mr. Bald-Brush finished speaking, Shi Lengwei and two servants entered the room bringing Ding Jian and laid him down on the carpet. Ding Jian's body was covered by a thin quilt. Bao Dachu lifted the quilt and lightly poked his

chest. Ding Jian screamed, showing that he was in extreme pain. Bao Dachu nodded and waved his hand telling them to take Ding Jian away. Shi Lingwei and the two servants carried Ding Jian out of the room.

"This hit is definitely caused by that bastard," said Bao Dachu.

The middle-aged woman who until this moment had not said a single word yet, suddenly said "Elder Bao, if that bastard escaped yesterday, then the message we got last month must be a fake. That bastard's follower is still outside spreading confusion, trying to make us sway in our loyalty."

Elder Bao shook his head and said, "It cannot be a fake."

"Cannot be a fake?" asked the middle-aged woman.

"Lord Xue Xiang's whole body was covered by a metal gown. He used this metal gown to practise kung fu and even a sabre cannot chop through it. But someone managed to grab and dig out his heart using just his five fingers. Besides this bastard, in this world, there's no second person who can do this..." reasoned Bao Dachu.

Linghu Chong was lost in thought while listening to the conversations inside the room. Suddenly, he felt his shoulder patted by someone. He was truly startled and quickly jumped three steps away. He pulled his sword out, turned his head and saw two people standing there.

As the moon was at the back of those two people, he couldn't see their faces. One of them turned his head and said, "Brother, let's go in."

It was Xiang Wentian's voice.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed and he whispered "Brother Xiang!"

However, the people inside the room had heard the sound of the sword being drawn and Linghu Chong's answer.

"Who's out there?" Bao Dachu shouted.

"Ha Ha Ha," the person beside Xiang Wentian laughed loudly.

This laugh shook the tiles inside the room while Linghu Chong started to feel an unbearable pain. He started to hear a "weng, weng" sound inside his ear and felt blood rushing up his stomach. That person took a step forward and used both hands to push towards the wall. A thunderous sound was heard. In the middle of the wall was now a big hole, which that person then used to enter the room.

Xiang Wentian stretched his hand and grabbed Linghu Chong's right hand. They entered the room side by side. Inside the room, the four elders were standing up and had their hands ready in front of them. Their faces looked very intense. Linghu Chong was anxious to know who this person was but the person's back was facing him. He looked very tall with black hair and was wearing a suit of blue-green gown.

Bao Dachu's voice was trembling when he said, "It's... It's Ren... Senior Ren has arrived."

"Humph," that person answered and took a long stride forward.

Bao Dachu and Mr. Huang Zhong involuntarily took two steps backwards. That person turned and sat at the chair which Bao Dachu sat in earlier. Linghu Chong now managed to see his face clearly. That person's face was long and white as snow, not a trace of blood could be seen on the face. His feature was handsome. But his white complexion was just like a corpse which had just come out from the grave.

He beckoned to Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong, "Brother Xiang, Brother Linghu Chong, please come and sit here."

When Linghu Chong heard his voice, he was pleasantly surprised.

"You... You are Senior Ren?" asked Linghu Chong.

That person smiled slightly and said "I am. Your sword art maybe much better."

"You're really out of trouble already. Today... Today, I came here to rescue you..." said Linghu Chong excitedly.

That person laughed and said, "Today you came here to rescue me out of prison, didn't you? HaHa, HaHa. Brother Xiang, your brother Ren has so many friends."

Xiang Wentian pulled Linghu Chong's hand and seated him on the right side of Senior Ren. Then he sat himself down on the left side.

"Brother Linghu is really sincere in dealing with people. You're really the world's most upright and courageous person," said Xiang Wentian.

"Brother Linghu, you've given up more than two months of your life to live in the dark underground prison. I feel very sorry for you. HaHa, HaHa!" said that person.

By now, Linghu Chong had an inkling but was not able to completely understand what was going on.

With a smile on his face, that person Ren looked at Linghu Chong and said, "You were imprisoned for more than two months because of me, but in that time you've finished learning the Art of Essence Absorbing that I had written on the iron panel. Hey Hey, that means I've paid you back for your time in there."

"That secret on the iron panel was written by senior?" asked Linghu Chong in surprise.

"If it wasn't me, then who else in the world knows Art of Essence Absorbing?" answered that person with a smile.

"Brother, Chief Ren's Art of Essence Absorbing has been passed on to you only. Congratulations!" said Xiang Wentian.

"Chief Ren?" asked Linghu Chong confused.

"Originally, when you arrived here, you didn't know Chief Ren's position. Chief Ren is the chief of Sun Moon Sect. His name is "Woxing". Have you heard of this name before?" asked Xiang Wentian.

Linghu Chong knew that "Sun Moon Sect" was the Devil sect, but he didn't know the origin of this sect. And the Jiang Hu people mostly knew of this religion by the name Devil Sect, and Devil Sect's chief had always been Dongfang Bubai. Where did Ren Woxing come out from?



"Chief... Chief Ren's name, I found it carved on the iron panel, but I didn't know that he was Chief," muttered Linghu Chong.

The tall and strong looking elder suddenly shouted, "What Chief is he? Everyone under the heaven knows that our Sun Moon Sect's chief is Chief Dongfang. This person Ren was expelled a long time ago for rebelling against our sect. Xiang Wentian, what you said was heresy, this is a big sin."

Ren Woxing slowly turned his head and stared at this elder. He then asked, "You are Qin Weibang, aren't you?"

"Correct," said that tall and strong looking elder.

"When I was the Chief, you were the master of our Jiangxi headquarter, correct?" asked Ren Woxing.

"That's right!" answered Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "You're now one of the Sect's 10 elders. You were promoted rather quickly, don't you think? How come Dongfang Bubai rates you so highly? Is it because of your martial art or is it because of you can take care of sect's business?"

"I'm loyal to the sect and takes care of sect's business. Also, my accomplishments in the past 10 years earned my promotion," replied Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "That's not too bad."

Suddenly, Ren Woxing's body shook. Before anyone can react, he was already in front of Bao Dachu. His left hand quickly shot out and grabbed Bao Dachu's throat. Bao Dachu was startled and he tried using his right hand, shaped in a knife-form, to deflect the grab but it was too late. So he used his left elbow to protect his throat. At the same time, he used his left foot to retreat a step, while using his knife-form right hand to hack down. This was done in an instant, one hand defending tightly and one hand attacking fiercely. A wise technique to use.

But Ren Woxing wasn't finished yet. His right hand was now coming in fast to grab Bao Dachu's right hand. Before

Bao Dachu was able to use his knife-form right hand to chop down, his chest was grabbed and his gown torn open. In Ren Woxing's left hand was now an object that he's grabbed from inside Bao Dachu's gown. It was the Black Command Wood. With his right hand turned over, he twisted Bao Dachu's right wrist.

At the same time, three "dang, dang, dang" sounds were heard. This was Xiang Wentian using his long sword to separate Qin Weibang and the other two elders from Bao Dachu. Each of the three elders had drawn their weapons. Xiang Wentian had attacked three times, but these attacks were only meant to prevent the three elders from helping Bao Dachu. When these three attacks were finished, Bao Dachu was completely under Ren Woxing's control.

Ren Woxing smiled and said, "I haven't used my Art of Essence Absorbing yet, you wanna taste it?"

Bao Dachu knew that if he didn't surrender then he would be killed in an instant. He has no other option but to surrender. So he made the decision quickly and said, "Chief Ren, Bao Dachu from now on vows loyalty and devotion to you."

"Once in the past, you swore loyalty to me and then you betrayed me," answered Ren Woxing.

"Chief Ren, please allow subordinate to atone for my sin by pledging my service to you," quivered Bao Dachu.

"Alright! Eat this pill first," said Ren Woxing and released his wrist.

He took out a small medicine bottle from his chest. He turned it over to get a fiery red pill out and threw the pill over to Bao Dachu. Bao Dachu grabbed the pill. Without looking at it, he put it in his mouth and swallowed it.

"This... This pill is "Three Corpse Brain" pill?" muttered Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said "Correct. This is definitely the "Three Corpse Brain"!"

He took out six more "Three Corpse Brain" pills and threw it on the table. The pills rolled on the table.

"Do you know how terrible these "Three Corpse Brain" pills are?" asked Ren Woxing.

"After taking the brain pill, our lives will be in Chief's hand, so we must forever follow Chief's order. Otherwise, the corpse bugs in the pill will be released and they will enter the brain and start eating it. The pain would be unbearable. Also, you will become insane just like a crazy dog," explained Bao Dachu.

"What you said is very true. You already knew the efficiency of my brain pill, how come you still took it?" asked Ren Woxing.

"From now on, subordinate will be loyal to Chief forever. Even though this brain pill is very efficient, it's irrelevant to me."

"HaHa! HaHa! Very good! Very good! Who else wants to take these pills?" said Ren Woxing laughing.

Mr. Huang Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint looked at each other in dismay. Along with Qin Weibang and the other two elders, these six people had been in Sun Moon Sect for a very long time. So they already knew that the corpse bugs inside the "Three Corpse Brain" pill didn't just break out suddenly. Usually, at noon every year at the dragon boat festival, they had to take the medicine to restrain the corpse bugs. If they didn't, then the corpse bugs would be released. Once the bugs entered the brain, this person would become like a ghost and would no longer have the capacity to reason. He would also lose all rationality. He would even eat his own parents or wife. No other poison in the world is as potent as this. Furthermore, the "Three Corpse Brain" pills were made by many different people and have different natures. So Chief Dongfang's medicine wouldn't have any effect on Ren Woxing's "Three Corpse Brain" poison.

They were all scared to death hesitating what to do. Suddenly, Mr. Black-White said loudly, "Chief, have mercy,

please. Subordinate will take one first." He was struggling to the table to take the pill. Ren Woxing lightly brushed away with his sleeve. Mr. Black-White was hit and fell hard on the ground, his brain matter scattered all over the wall.

"You're a crippled and have lost all your martial art already. Don't waste my wonder pill," coldly smiled Ren Woxing.

"Qin Weibang, Wang Cheng, Sang San Niang, you guys don't want to take my wonder pill?" asked Ren Woxing as he turned his head to them.

The middle-aged woman, Sang San Niang, bowed and said "Subordinate vows her loyalty to Chief from now on."

The fat and short looking elder, Wang Cheng, honestly said, "Subordinate sacrifice myself willingly to Chief."

Both took a pill each from the table and swallowed them. Those two people dreaded Ren Woxing completely. They had already seen with their own eyes Ren Woxing's ruthlessness. They would never dare to revolt again.

When Ren Woxing was Chief, Qin Weibang was in charge of the headquarter responsible for several districts. He had seen the various fierce methods that Ren Woxing used.

"I won't accompany you!" shouted Qin Weibang as he jumped through the hole in the wall.

"HaHa, HaHa!" laughed Ren Woxing without trying to stop him escaping.

Qin Weibang's body was outside the wall when a long and slender black whip shot out from Xiang Wentian's left sleeve. Everyone in the room heard a cry of "Ah" from outside the wall as the whip was now being pulled back through the hole in the wall. Qin Weibang was being dragged back through the wall with the whip coiled around his left foot. He struggled with all his might, rolling around on the ground trying to break free.

"Sang San Niang, take a brain pill and peel its outside skin," said Ren Woxing.

"Yes!" responded Sang San Niang.

She took one pill from the table and used her finger to peel its shell. Inside the pill was a small gray coloured round ball.

"Feed it to him," ordered Ren Woxing.

"Yes!" answered Sang San Niang. She went in front of Qin Weibang and ordered, "Open your mouth!"

He turned around and shot out a palm. Even though his kung fu was slightly above Sang San Niang, but his ankle was under the whip's control. So his palm power was greatly reduced. Sang San Niang's left foot kicked his wrist, followed by her right foot kicking his chest, and in Yuan yang mandarin style, her left foot kicked again at his shoulder. These three kicks had sealed his accupoints. She then used her left hand to pinch his jaw forcing it to open and her right hand put the peeled brain pill in his mouth. Her right hand followed by pinching his throat, making him swallowed the pill.

Linghu Chong had been observing everything intently. He thought that these people had acted as if these things happened all the time in their normal ordinary days.

"This granny's hand and foot movements are clever," Linghu Chong thought. He didn't know that Sang Sa Niang used her "hand capturing" martial art to show off her vitality and unique skill to Ren Woxing. Also, she wanted to show the Chief that she was loyal to him. Ren Woxing nodded his approval and smiled. Sang San Niang got up and stood guard respectfully besides Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing turned around and looked at Mr. Huang Zhong and his two brothers. They understood that he was asking them whether they were going to take the pill or not.

Without speaking a single word, Mr. Bald-Brush went to take a pill and swallowed it.

Mr. Paint was mumbling to himself before he finally went and took a pill.

Mr. Huang Zhong looked grieved. He took a book out of his bosom. This was the "Guang Ling San" music score. He

walked to Linghu Chong and said, "Your honorable's martial art is very high. You are also very wise to setup this strategy to help Ren Woxing got out. I admire you. This music score has harmed us four brothers. I return this to you." He then tossed the music score to Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong was startled. He then saw Mr. Huang Zhong turned around and walked towards the wall. Feeling regret and sorrow watching Mr. Huang Zhong walking towards the wall, he couldn't help thinking, "This was all Brother Xiang's plan to save Chief Ren. I didn't even know anything about it. But Mr. Huang Zhong and the two brothers will hate me always. I can never separate myself from this matter."

Mr. Huang Zhong leaned against the wall and said, "Originally, we four brothers entered the Sun Moon Sect with the intention of upholding justice in Jiang Hu. But Chief Ren's temper was very irritable and he used the power for his own gain. So we four brothers didn't get involved much in sect's affairs. When Chief Dongfang became Chief, he was crafty and villainous, and he expelled a lot of brothers from the sect. We four brothers became downhearted. So we asked to be sent here, to be far away from Dark Wood Cliff and not to be involved in other people's affairs. So we stayed in the West Lake cherishing the arts. In the past twelve years, we've enjoyed a lot of happiness and good fortune. A man's life is full of worry and short of happiness. This is fate... " Speaking until here, a "heng" sound was heard. His body slowly dropped down.

"Big Brother!" shouted Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint. They ran to Mr. Huang Zhong's side to support him. Only to see a dagger sticking out of his heart, his two eyes opened wide, and his breath had stopped.

"Big Brother! Big brother!" cried both of them, their tears pouring down.

Wang Cheng applauded and said, "This old fellow didn't follow Chief's order. Now, he's killed himself fearing his

crime. He's also added one more crime to his name. What are you two chaps being noisy about?"

Mr. Paint, his face full of anger, turned around. He wanted to charge at Wang Cheng disregarding his own life.

"What? You wanna rebel?" smirked Wang Cheng.

Mr. Paint remembered that he had taken the "Three Brain Corpse" pill already. From here on, he mustn't defy Ren Woxing's order at all. With this in mind, his anger subsided. He merely lowered his head and wiped his tears.

"Bring his corpse and this crippled corpse outside. Bring in the wine and dishes! Today, I'm gonna get drunk with Brother Xiang and Brother Linghu!" said Ren Woxing.

"Right away!" said Mr. Bald-Brush after he'd brought Mr. Huang Zhong's corpse outside.

A servant came in and arranged six sets of bowls and chopsticks.

"Take away three sets. How can we share a table with Chief?" said Bao Dachu while helping to setup the bowls and chopsticks.

"You have worked hard also. Have a drink outside," said Ren Woxing.

Bao Dachu, Wang Cheng, and Sang San Niang bowed together and replied "Thank you for Chief's grace." They then withdrew out of the room slowly.

After Linghu Chong saw Mr. Huang Zhong's suicide, he came to regard him as a righteous and upright person. He remembered the day when Mr. Huang Zhong offered to write a letter to Shaolin Abbot Fang Zheng to treat Linghu Chong's illness. Linghu Chong couldn't help but feel sad at Mr. Huang Zhong's death.

"Brother, you've had a really good fortune being able to learn Chief's Art of Essence Absorbing. Let's hear your story," said Xiang Wentian smiling. So Linghu Chong told them how he found the skill on the iron panel and everything that went on afterwards.

"Congratulations, this type of opportunity is really precious. It makes brother's life good and happy," said Xiang Wentian happily. As he finished speaking, he lifted his wine cup and chugged it down in a mouthful. Ren Woxing and Linghu Chong also lifted their wine cups and chugged them down.

Looking happy, Ren Woxing said, "When you look at this matter, it is actually very dangerous. Initially, when I engraved this martial art's secrets on the iron panel, I was just feeling melancholy and wanting to kill some time. I didn't actually have any intention to preserve this martial art. This divine martial art is of course real, but I didn't leave any direction to help in learning or to avoid having "fire deviation". This is to prevent people from getting this skill. There are two major difficulties in learning this divine skill. The first difficulty involves scattering all of the body's internal energy and emptying everything from the Dantian region. If the internal energy is not emptied out or if it was scattered into the wrong acupoints, you will get "fire deviation". At best, your whole body will be paralysed and you will be crippled. At worst, your meridians will flow backwards and you will bleed to death from 7 holes in your body. This martial art was created by Cheng Yida several hundred years ago and it is rare to get instructions for it. Also, very few people finished learning it completely because this scattering step is very difficult. Brother Linghu actually had a few big advantages. First, you have lost all of your internal energy. So you didn't care about scattering your energy and it didn't take too much effort for you to complete the first step. For other people, this is the most difficult and dangerous step. You, on the other hand, passed this step unexpectedly and unwittingly. After scattering your internal energy, it is essential to absorb other people's qi immediately. This energy from another person must be stored in your Dantian and then scattered into your 8 meridians. Ordinarily, this step is also very difficult. Your whole internal



energy has just been dispersed into the meridians. You then must absorb someone's qi. How can this be an easy thing to do? Who wants to give up his life for you to practice this skill? Brother Linghu again had an advantage with this second difficulty. I've heard Brother Xiang said that, there are 8 types of internal energy in your body from various masters. Although they are only a portion of each person's qi, each one is already extremely good. Brother Linghu, you've passed these two major obstacles very easily and finished learning the skill. It must be heaven's will."

Linghu Chong's palm was wet with cold sweat. He said, "Luckily all my internal energy was lost already. Otherwise, I don't dare to think what would have happened. Brother Xiang, how did Chief Ren escape from the underground prison? Little brother still doesn't know how this happened."

Xiang Wentian chuckled and took out an object from his bosom and put it on Linghu Chong's palm.

"What's this?" asked Linghu Chong as he felt a hard ball on his palm. It was the object that he gave to Ren Woxing on that day. He opened his palm and saw a metal ball. There was an inlay with a metal bead on the ball. He pushed the metal bead and it turned around in the inlay. When he pulled on the bead, an extremely fine metal thread came out of it. The end of this metal thread was connected to the ball on his hand. With a row of saw tooth, this metal thread was just like a metal wire saw. Linghu Chong was suddenly enlightened.

"So that was how the shackles on Chief's hands and feet were broken!" exclaimed Linghu Chong.

"I completely knocked out all five of you by laughing a few times using my internal energy. Then I used that metal saw to cut the shackles. How did you deal with Mr. Black-White when you were escaping? What do you think I did?" asked Ren Woxing with a smile.

"First, you switched your clothes with mine and then you shackled my hands and feet. No wonder Mr. Huang Zhong didn't notice what happened." beamed Linghu Chong.

"Of course, it wasn't easy to conceal this from Mr. Huang Zhong and Mr. Black-White. But when they woke up, Chief and I had already left the Plum Manor. We left them the chess book, the music score, the calligraphy and the painting. Seeing these probably made them very happy. How can they suspect that the person inside the prison has escaped?" explained Xiang Wentian.

"Brother's strategy was certainly divine. No other person could have done it this well." said Linghu Chong. But in his heart, he was thinking, "You planned all of this from the very beginning. You deceived these four people to lead us inside the prison. But it has been a long time since Chief escaped. How come it took you so long to rescue me?"

Xiang Wentian noticed the change of color on Linghu Chong's face and guessed correctly what Linghu Chong was thinking.

With a smile, he said, "Brother, Chief had many major matters to deal with after the escape from prison. We cannot let the enemy know of the escape at the time. So, it was better to wrong you and let you stay under the West Lake for several days first. Didn't we come to rescue you today? However, we found you've turned bad luck into good fortune and have finished learning this marvelous martial art. That should compensate for your time in there. HaHaHa. Wasn't it a fair trade?" Saying this, Xiang Wentian filled their wine cups to the brim.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, "Cheers!" Each of them gulped their wine down.

"What fair trade? I have to thank the two of you. Originally, I had serious internal injuries that have no cure in this world. After learning Chief's divine martial art, this internal injuries were healed, giving me back one life," smiled Linghu Chong.

The three of them laughed loudly, feeling very happy.

"Twelve years ago, Chief went missing and Dongfang Bubai seized power. When I found out about this matter, I

could only bear patiently. So I worked together with Dongfang Bubai with little interest. Until recently, when I found out that Chief was being imprisoned here. I came here straight away to help Chief escape from this prison. How was I supposed to know that when I descended from Dark Wood Cliff, that bastard Dongfang Bubai would send many groups to kill me. Then I accidentally met with those orthodox sect scoundrel bastards when they were having a meeting. Brother, that day at the bottom of the valley, you told me the reason for losing your internal energy. At that time, I thought of scattering your various strange internal energies. At the present age, only Chief can do this," reasoned Xiang Wentian.

After drinking more than ten cups of wine, Linghu Chong thought that this person Ren Woxing's style of speaking was heroic, his knowledge and experience were not ordinary. He really was a rare grand hero. He couldn't help but to admire him. At first, when he saw how he dealt with Qin Weibang, Mr. Huang Zhong and Mr. Black-White, he thought that his method was excessively vicious. But after hearing him talk, he quite resembled that of a hero. Also, he thought that his temperament couldn't often be this vicious. Hence, his heart, which at first, held a resentful thought towards Ren Woxing gradually subsided.

"Brother Linghu, when we treat with the enemy, we treat them viciously. Managing subordinates must also be strict. You're probably not accustomed to it. But you think, how long have I been locked up under the West Lake's underground prison? You've been imprisoned in there, you know how it feels like. How do others treat me? Regarding the enemy's rebel, can you treat them compassionately?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong nodded agreeing with him. Suddenly, he wanted to deal with a matter and stood up.

"I have a matter to request from Chief, hopefully Chief will agree to it," said Linghu Chong.

"What matter?" asked Ren Woxing.

"The day when I first met Chief, I heard Mr. Huang Zhong said, that when Chief escaped and re-entered Jiang Hu. That you will give Huashan School great trouble. I also heard Chief said that if you meet my master then you will give him some embarrassments. Chief's martial art is godly, if you give trouble to Huashan School, then no one there would be able to withstand it," said Linghu Chong.

"I heard Brother Xiang said that your master announced to everyone that you've been expelled from Huashan School. I'll go and disgrace them. After we've found them, we'll wipe Huashan School out from the Wulin world. This is to substitute for the bitter feeling in your heart," told Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong shook his head and replied, "My parents died when I was young. It was Master and Master-wife's kindness that they took me in. They took care of me when I was growing up and then took me in as a disciple. They're like parents to me. It was my fault that Master expelled me from the school. Also, there might be some misunderstanding between us. I wouldn't dare blame my kind Master."

"It was Yue Buqun who treated you heartlessly. But you're not willing to seek justice?" smiled Ren Woxing.

"I beg for Chief's kindness and to be broadminded. Please don't go after my Master, Master-wife, and Huashan School's disciples," said Linghu Chong.

"Emm, I've escaped from that dark prison and you've also had your strive at the same time. But I've passed on to you the divine skill Art of Essence Absorbing and saved your life. Both things should be equal. I've re-entered Jiang Hu and have a lot of grudges. I can't agree to your request. Later, when I handle my affairs, I can't have both my hands and feet tied," answered Ren Woxing.

Hearing him said this, Linghu Chong felt that his master would meet great difficulty. He couldn't help but felt anxious.

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "Little brother, sit down. Today, in this world, I only trust you and Brother Xiang. You requested one matter from me. We can always discuss this. How about this? I also have a request to make to you. Why don't you agree to this matter for me first? After today, when I meet Huashan's disciples, as long as they're not disrespectful towards me, then I won't bother them. Even if I must teach them a lesson, if I see you at that time, I will hold my hand and only use thirty percent of my power. What do you say to this?"

Linghu Chong was very happy. He replied, "I'm deeply grateful for this. Who dares not to follow Chief's order?"

"We three are now sworn brothers, from today, we'll share all happiness and woes together. Brother Xiang is Sun Moon Sect's Guang Ming Zuo Shi (left protector). You will become my sect's Guang Ming You Shi (right protector). What do you think of this?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong was startled when he heard this. He didn't anticipate that Ren Woxing wanted him to join the Devil Sect. When he was young, he heard from Master and Master-wife that Devil Sect has many kinds of evil and vicious people. After he'd been expelled from Huashan School, he was thinking of just leisurely wandering the Jiang Hu and not belonging to any school or sect. Even if his body wanted to join the Devil Sect, his mind thought that he should not. His heart was disconcerted. He didn't know how to answer.

Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian were staring at him. The room was now completely quiet and not a single sound could be heard.

After some time, Linghu Chong said, "Chief is very kind to let me, Linghu Chong, enter the sect so late. But how would I dare to stand side-by-side with Chief? Also, I'm still hoping that, even though I don't have a chance to rejoin Huashan School, Master will have a change of attitude and take back his command...."

Ren Woxing smiled tastelessly and said, "You call me Chief. Actually, although I've escaped from prison, my life is still in a precarious state and this word "Chief" means nothing. It's only good to hear. Today, everyone knows that Sun Moon Sect's Chief is Dongfang Bubai. This person's kung fu is high and is not below me at all. His strategy and wisdom are also above me. With a signal from him, many people will rush to help him against only Brother Xiang and me. So, taking the position of Chief from him is a hopeless battle. It's a foolish and deluded action. You're not willing to be my sworn brother. Of course, this is a wise idea to protect your own life. Come, come, come! Let's drink wine and be happy. Let this matter rest."

"How did Dongfang Bubai take away Chief's power and position? Also how did you get imprisoned in the underground prison? There are many matters that I still don't understand. Can these two matters be explained?" asked Linghu Chong.

Ren Woxing shook his head. His smile was mournful. He said, "I've been living under the lake for 12 years. What fame and authority do I have left? Hey, hey. I've grown older and my temper has also become worse."

He filled a wine cup to the brim, drank it in a mouthful, and laughed loudly. His laughter sounded sad and forlorn.

"Brother, that day Dongfang Bubai sent a lot of people to chase after me, you've seen his vicious method with your own eyes. If you didn't give me a hand, I would've become minced-meat in that pavilion. Right now, your heart is divided between the orthodox school and the Devil Sect. But on that day, those several hundred people from both sides allied together and tried to kill the two of us. Where is the division? What orthodox school? What devil sect? Actually this division is only artificial. Inside the orthodox schools, there are good people. But don't they also have some despicable and evil disciples? Although the Devil Sect has no shortages of bad people, but we three people would be able

to hold the power in the sect. So we'll be able to reorganise the sect well and get rid of those evil degenerates. Won't we then be seen as a proud and heroic sect in Jiang Hu?" Xiang Wentian said.

Linghu Chong nodded and said, "What big brother said is true."

"Back in those days, Chief treated Dongfang Bubai fairly. He was promoted to the position of left protector and was given all the power in the sect. Meanwhile, Chief was concentrating on correcting some small flaws in the Art of Essence Absorbing. That wolf Dongfang Bubai, with his unexpectedly wild ambition, took care of everyday affairs. On the surface, he treated Chief respectfully and didn't dare to violate anything. But secretly, he gathered power to himself and did things on false pretexts. He removed all the ministers loyal to Chief, all were possibly killed. A few years later, all of Chief's trusted people were all gone. Chief is an upright and most sincere person. He saw that Dongfang Bubai was respectful and prudent so he didn't suspect anything. But Dongfang Bubai had positioned himself well in the sect with his hands in everything. He had everything arranged to his liking. We didn't have any suspicion from the beginning to the end," explained Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "Brother Xiang, I'm actually very ashamed of this matter. You honestly told me many times to guard against treachery. But I trusted Dongfang Bubai too highly and I didn't like to hear those honest talk. Instead I thought you were jealous of him. After I blamed you, you sowed dissension and a lot of lives were lost. Then you left in anger and from then on we haven't met again till now."

"I wouldn't dare to blame Chief. I merely saw that something wasn't right. That Dongfang Bubai encircled us secretly then launched his attack. If subordinate was besides Chief at that time, then I would also suffer his violent treachery. Although I was willing to face difficulty and death for the sect, I had to consider about the future in this case. So

I felt that I must have a way to escape for every situation. If Chief was able to see through his deceitful heart and ordered him to not pursue his own goals, then I would have been really happy. Otherwise, I should be outside the sect. At the very least, I should avoid him unless he discovered about my suspicion," said Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing nodded and said, "That's true. But how did I know about your pain at that time? I only saw you left without saying goodbye and felt really angry. At the same time, my martial art practice had just reached its critical point and I nearly had a calamity. That Dongfang Bubai actually did everything to please me and advised me not to worry. Then I fell even deeper in his plot, I went as far as giving him the sect's secret Sunflower Scripture."

When Linghu Chong heard of this "Sunflower Scripture", he let out an "ah".

"Brother, you also know about the "Sunflower Scripture"?" asked Xiang Wentian.

"I only heard master mentioned this name before. I knew that it's a deep and profound martial art secret. But I didn't know that it was in Chief's possession," answered Linghu Chong.

"For many years, "Sunflower Scripture" has been Sun Moon Sect's well guarded treasure. It is handed down from the previous Chief to the next. When I was practising the Art of Essence Absorbing, I neglected to eat and sleep. I didn't care about any matters at all and I wanted to give up the position of Chief to Dongfang Bubai. So I gave Dongfang Bubai the "Sunflower Scripture". This is to make him understand clearly about my intention. That not long after, I was going to give the position of Chief to him. Ai, originally Dongfang Bubai is a very intelligent person. But once he understood that he was going to get the position of Chief, why did he have to rush in getting it and not willing to wait until I formally give him the position myself? Why did he instead rebel to seize this position?" said Ren Woxing.



He scowled and it appears that even until now he didn't understand clearly about this matter.

"Apparently, he couldn't wait a moment longer. He didn't know when Chief was going to formally give him the position. So he worried and afraid that something might suddenly change," explained Xiang Wentian.

"Actually, he already secured everything for himself. What sudden change should he be afraid of? It's difficult to predict the minds of other people. When I was in the underground prison, I went over his treasonous plan from many different angles, trying to understand. Why did he suddenly launch the attack? Even until now, I still don't understand his logic. Originally, he was a little bit jealous of you, afraid that I might give the position of chief to you. But he'd seen you left with his own eyes. So it was better for him to just wait for a little while," reasoned Ren Woxing.

"At the night of the dragon boat festival's feast in the same year that Dongfang Bubai launched his attack, Miss said something at the banquet. Does Chief still remember what she said?" asked Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing scratched his head pondering, "Dragon boat festival? What did that little Miss say? Hmm. What's the connection? I don't remember."

"Chief, don't treat Miss as a little child. She's very clever and thoughtful, and no lesser than any adult. That year, miss is seven years old, right? She was at the banquet looking at people when she suddenly asked you, "Dad, dad, how come when we drink wine at the dragon boat festival every year, there's always one person less?" You were startled and asked her, " What do you mean there is one person less every year?" Miss answered, "I remembered there were 11 people last year. The year before, there were 12 people. This year, one, two, three, four, five... we only have ten,"" recounted Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "That's true. Ahh. At that time, when I heard what little miss said, I felt very unhappy.

The year before, Dongfang Bubai had executed younger brother Hao Xian. The year before that, Elder Qiu died at Gansu with no clear reason. When I think about it now, this must have been Dongfang Bubai's evil doing. And one year before that, Elder Wen was removed from the sect and was killed by the masters from SongShan School, TaiShan School and HengShan School. That disaster must also be Dongfang Bubai's doing. Ai, little miss accidentally said the right word and revealed his plan. At that time, my mind was like in a dream, I couldn't comprehend it."

He stopped for a while and gulped his wine down.

He continued, "This Art of Essence Absorbing was created by Xiao Yao Sect in times of Northern Song. It was a combination of the two skills, BeiMing Shen Gong and Hua Gong DaFa (Author's note: Please read "Tian Long Ba Bu"), which were left behind by Dali's Duan family and XingXiu Sect respectively. They were combined into one, and became the Art of Essence Absorbing. The Art of Essence Absorbing's main principle is inherited from Hua Gong DaFa. But the scholars who wrote the formula down didn't know the proper way, so there were some flaws on the skill. In the meantime, for more than ten years, I've been repairing this Art of Essence Absorbing. In Jiang Hu, this divine martial art still has a big reputation. When people from orthodox school hear this name, they still tremble with fear. But I know that this divine martial art has a few big flaws in it. In the beginning, I didn't feel anything wrong. But later, a disastrous problem was slowly revealed. In those several years, I came to understand the problem deeply. I knew that if I don't find the remedy soon, I would one day die by "fire deviation". Those energy that I've absorbed from other people could suddenly reverse. Because I've absorbed a lot of energy, the reverse energy would also be just as big."

When Linghu Chong heard all this, he secretly felt that there was one big thing that wasn't right. Ren Woxing continued, "At that time, I've already absorbed the internal

energies of ten evil masters. But because each of the ten internal energies was very strong and different, they prohibited each other from being sent to different gates. I believed that there must be a way to make all these internal energy harmonious and whole so that I could use them. Otherwise, I will always be in danger. In those few years, I thought day and night on how to solve this problem to the point that I neglected everything except thinking on this matter. That day at the Dragon Boat Festival feast, although I was drinking wine and cracking jokes, but in my heart, I sought a way that would allow the energy in my body to flow freely amidst the twenty-two acupoints of the Yangjiao Channel and the thirty-two acupoints of the Yangwei Channel. These made up a total of fifty-four acupoints, through which the energy could flow in its passage from the Yangjiao into the Yangwei and vice-versa."

"At that time, I also thought that it was strange as Chief is usually alert. Chief only needs to hear half a word to know what a person wants to say. You observed everything and missed nothing. But in those several years, not only were you not aware of Dongfang Bubai's treasonous plan, but also every day... every day..." sighed Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing smiled a little and said, "Everyday I was dazed and witless. My mind seemed to be elsewhere all the time."

"That's true. Ahhh. After miss said those words, Dongfang Bubai laughed and said, "Miss, you love things to be lively, don't you? Next year, we'll invite more people to drink wine" When he said those words, his face was full of happiness. But when I observed his eyes, it was full of hesitation. He must've suspected that Chief knew of what he was up to. And that right then, Chief was just pretending to be ignorant to test him. He knew that Chief is astute so he expected that Chief knew about his plan already," said Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing scowled and said, "I couldn't remember at all what little miss said at the dragon boat festival's feast twelve

years ago. I now remember only after you mentioned about it. That's right, when Dongfang Bubai heard those words, how can it not raise his suspicions?"

"Also, Dongfang Bubai was afraid that Miss would see through his treasonous plan in a year or two when she had grown up and gotten even smarter. Furthermore, he was afraid that if he waited until she became an adult, Chief might give the position of Chief to her. So, when Dongfang Bubai heard this, he didn't dare to wait any longer. He took a risk and launched the attack. This is the logic behind all this," Xiang Wentian explained.

Ren Woxing nodded his head agreeing with what Xiang Wentian said.

"Ai, if my daughter is by my side right now, then we'll have one more person and our position wouldn't be as weak as right now," said Ren Woxing.

Xiang Wentian turned to Linghu Chong and said, "Brother, Chief has already said that there's a big flaw with the Art of Essence Absorbing. As far as I know, Chief was working on a solution to fix this divine martial art while he endured being imprisoned for the last 12 years. Of course, by the time he escaped from that prison, he already had a breakthrough and found the solution for this divine martial art. Chief, is this right?"

Ren Woxing rubbed his thick black fine beard, laughed, and was feeling proud of himself. He said, "Of course. From now on, when I absorb other people's energy, I don't have to worry about these energies suddenly reversing. HaHa! Brother Linghu, take a deep breath, don't you feel there's qi drumming fiercely at your Yuzhen and Shanzhong acupoints?"

Linghu Chong took a deep breath and felt a faint qi flowing at his Yuzhen and Shanzhong acupoints. He couldn't help that his complexion changed as he did this.

"You've only begun your practice, so you can probably only feel it a little bit. But during those years, before I found

the remedy, the qi in these two pressure points was drumming really fiercely. It felt like the sky was falling down and the earth shaking. It was torture. Even though I looked calm and quiet outside, inside my ears, it sounded like there were a thousand horses charging through. Sometimes, it sounded like thunder continuously striking down. Ai, if I wasn't having such a big disaster with my qi, how can Dongfang Bubai's treasonous plan have succeeded?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong knew that Ren Woxing was saying the truth. He also knew that Xiang Wentian mentioned this problem to get him to ask for advice from Ren Woxing. But he was determined not to join the Sun Moon Sect and ask for Ren Woxing's help. He couldn't say anything, but in his heart, he was thinking, "I've already learned his Art of Essence Absorbing. This skill absorbs other people's energy for myself to use. It's a very selfish and vicious skill. I had decided not to practise and use it. If I can't stop these absorbed energies from reversing, then that's the way it's gonna be. This is gonna be my fate. How can Linghu Chong be greedy and be afraid of death? How can I commit a big violation over this when I'm originally sincere?"

After he mulled over this matter in his mind, he said, "Chief, I would like to consult you on a matter I still don't understand. My master said that the "Sunflower Scripture" is the most supreme martial arts secret. No one will be able to match you in the whole world after learning this martial art. He said your life would also be prolonged to over 100 years. How come you didn't learn this martial art and instead learned that dangerously fierce Art of Essence Absorbing?"

Ren Woxing weakly smiled and said, "I don't think outsiders are worthy enough to know the reason."

Linghu Chong's face turned red when he heard this. He said, "Yes, I was too bold."

"Brother, Chief is already old, your big brother is also only a few years younger than him. If you enter the sect,

then Chief's successor will of course be you. I know that you dislike the Sun Moon Sect's bad reputation. But when you're chief, wouldn't you have the power in hand to reorganise the sect so that people in this world would benefit from it?" Xiang Wentian logically told Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong felt that Xiang Wentian's speech was logical and reasonable. He was moved. He saw Ren Woxing picked up his wine cup and with his right hand, picked up the wine pot and filled the cup to the brim. Ren Woxing then said, "Several hundred years ago, there was enmity between my Sun Moon sect and the orthodox sects and schools. After that, we couldn't coexist anymore. If you adhere stubbornly to this opinion and don't enter our sect then your internal injuries will be difficult to heal and your life isn't guaranteed. This doesn't need to be said. Also, I'm afraid that your Master and Master-wife of Huashan school... Hey, hey, I want to make all of Huashan School disciples perish and stamp Huashan School out of existence from the Wulin world. This isn't a hard thing to do at all. It was fate that brought us here together. If you agree with my suggestion, then please drink this cup of wine."

These words were said threateningly. Linghu Chong's felt his anger rising up and in a clear voice said, "Chief, big brother, originally my injuries were enough to shorten my life and I was only living from day to day. Then I accidentally learned Chief's divine martial art. But now, because I'm unable to meld all the energies together, I might not live long. So it's just like my old injuries. This is no big deal. For a long time, I've already thought my life was unimportant. Dead or alive, I still have my life now. Huashan School has been around for several hundred years and has managed to survive till now. It's not necessarily true that other people can just raise their hands and destroy Huashan School. Today, we've finished our talk. Let us part here."

As soon as he finished speaking, he cupped his hands in salute towards the two people, turned around and left.

Xiang Wentian still had words to say but Linghu Chong was already far away. As Linghu Chong ran out of the Plum Manor, he felt the cold air brushing his body and he felt unrestrained in his heart. As he sighed and raised his head, he saw the crescent moon hanging from the tip of a willow branch. In the middle of the lake, he could see reflections of the bright moon and the clouds on the water. When he reached the bank of the lake, he stood there quietly for some time and thought, "Chief Ren must now be going to Dongfang Bubai to settle the matter concerning the position of Chief. He wouldn't search for Huashan School straight away to bring them trouble. But, Master, Master-wife, and martial brothers and sisters didn't know about this matter. If they meet him, they may suffer under his violent hands. I must tell them as soon as possible so that they can be prepared. But I don't know whether they've returned from Fuzhou or not. From here, it's not that far to Fuzhou. I don't have anything else to do. I'll just go to Fuzhou for a trip. If they're on their way back, then maybe I'll meet them on the way."

His thought immediately turned to the letter his master wrote to the Wulin world. In that letter, his Master announced that he'd been expelled from Huashan school. A sour feeling rose up in his heart as he remembered this. He thought to himself, "I'm going to report to Master and Master-wife about Chief Ren compelling me to join his sect. They will understand that I didn't intentionally make friends with people from Devil sect. Maybe Master will take back his command and will only punish me to spend three years on top of that cliff thinking about my fault. If that's the case, then it's going to be good." Thinking that there may be a chance to re-enter the school, his spirit rose.

He immediately started off to look for an inn to stay overnight. He felt that he would be able to sleep long until noon this time. Then he thought that as he hadn't seen Master and Master-wife, it would be better to hide his original

appearance. Furthermore, Yingying gave orders to those people to take his life. So, he felt it'd be best to disguise himself and not look for trouble. But what appearance should he take on for his disguise?

As he was deep in thought, he arrived at an inn. He walked slowly into the inn. Just as he entered the courtyard, he suddenly heard the sound of a door being opened and a basin full of water splashed towards him. He evaded quickly as the basin emptied out. In front of him was an angry looking military officer glaring at him, holding a wooden wash basin. The officer rudely shouted, "Did you not bring your eyes? Didn't you see grandfather throwing water out?"

Linghu Chong was feeling angry. He couldn't believe that such an unruly and unreasonable man existed. With a fine thick beard, this military officer looked like he was around forty years old. He was wearing a full body military gown and there was a Yaodao saber on his waist. Linghu Chong thought that he was probably an officer from a military school. With his chest flat and his belly bulging out, he looked accustomed to the good living.

That military officer loudly shouted, "What are you looking at? You don't recognise your granddad?"

Linghu Chong suddenly got an inspiration, "Why don't I disguise myself as this military officer? He's quite interesting. I'll be walking around Jiang Hu in an impressive disguise. People in Wulin won't even give me a second look."

That military officer shouted loudly again, "What are you laughing at? Your granny<sup>6</sup>, what's so funny?"

Linghu Chong unconsciously smiled, feeling proud of himself. When he went to the counter to pay for a room and meal, he whispered to the innkeeper, "What's the background of that military officer?"

The shopkeeper frowned at his question, but he still answered, "Who knows where he comes from? He came from Beijing and has stayed here for one night. The servants served him three meals already. He's also ordered a good



quantity of good wine and good meat. Don't know if he's going to pay or not."

Linghu Chong nodded and walked into the teahouse. He brewed a pot of tea and slowly drank it. After waiting for an hour, he heard the sound of a horse trotting. That military officer was going out of the inn on a red jujube-coloured horse. While lashing his horsewhip making a "Pai, pai" sound, he was loudly bellowing, "Make way! Make way! Your granny, hurry up and get away!" A few people were too slow getting out of his way and got lashed by the whip.

Linghu Chong already paid for his tea, so he got up and followed the horse. He saw the officer exiting from the west gate and galloping away on the southwesterly road. After a few li, there were less and less people on the road, so Linghu Chong quickened his steps. He rushed to the front of the horse and raised his right hand. The horse was frightened and reared at him causing that officer to almost fall from the horse.

Linghu Chong shouted loudly, "Your granny, didn't you bring your eyes? Your horse almost kicked this old man to death!"

That officer didn't open his mouth but he looked indignant and snorted three times. He waited till his horse's front foot dropped back down before he selected a whip and lashed out towards Linghu Chong's head. He saw that it's inconvenient to settle this matter on the main road so he shouted, "Ai yo!" and staggered into the forest. That officer wasn't willing to just let Linghu Chong go like that. So he dismounted his horse and quickly tied the horse's rein on a tree. He was madly impatient to start chasing.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Ai yo! I want my mommy!" as he fled into the forest.

That military officer started pursuing and raised a clamor as he was running through the forest. Suddenly he felt a tingling sensation on the side of his body and fell down on the ground. Linghu Chong's left foot stepped on his chest

and laughingly said, "Your granny, your skill isn't good. How can you march to war?" He searched the officer's bosom and took out a big envelope. On the envelope was the "Seal of the Ministry of War Office" on red vermillion and a written word "Announcement" in big letters. He opened the letter and took out a thick paper. It was the ministry of war office's appointment order. Written on it was the promotion of Hebei's Cangzhou prefecture's officer Wu Tiande to become Fujian's Quanzhou prefecture's general.

Linghu Chong laughed and said, "Oh, it's big general, so you're Wu Tiande?"

That officer was pinned underneath Linghu Chong's foot and his face starting to turn purple.

"Let me get up! Quickly! You... you... very daring. Insulting a government official, not... not afraid of the law?" shouted that officer. Although he was shouting, his anger had long been exhausted.

Smiling, Linghu Chong said, "Your old man doesn't have anything to tie you up with but I want to borrow your clothes to try on," After saying so, he knocked out the officer by hitting him on the head with his palm.

He then quickly took the officer's clothes off. Thinking that this guy was hateful, he decided to teach him a lesson and took off all his underwear, leaving the officer buck-naked on the ground. He then picked up the officer's bundle and opened it. Inside, there were several hundreds silver taels and three gold coins. He thought, "This must have been taken away from good and honest people. It's going to be hard to return these to the owners. I'll just have to use it to buy wine for my General Wu Tiande." He chuckled as he thought of this. Immediately, he took off his clothes and put on the officer's clothes, leather boots, and Yaodao saber. He also took the bundle with him. Afterwards, using a strip of his own clothes, he tied the officer's hands to a tree and stuffed his mouth full with mud. He thought for a while and took his knife out to shave the officer's beard and put those shaved

beard in his bosom. He smiled and remarked, "You've changed into a pretty face now. You've become much more beautiful."

When he got back to the main road, he untied the horse's rein and mounted it. He lashed out with the whip and shouted, "Make way! Make way! Your granny, didn't you bring your eyes? HaHa, HaHa!" Laughing loudly, he galloped away to the south.

That same night, he arrived at an inn at the border area of Hangzhou. The shopkeeper and servant at that inn greeted him with "Army officer, army officer". At daybreak, Linghu Chong asked the shopkeeper the road to Fujian. After receiving 5 taels of silver, the shopkeeper and his servant accompanied him while bowing all the way to the door. Linghu Chong thought, "You guys are fortunate that you met my general; if you had actually met the real General Wu Tiande, you would certainly have suffered." After leaving the inn, he went to a store and bought a face mirror and a bottle of glue water. Once he got outside the city, he looked for a desolated place. Once he got there, he took out the mirror and carefully glued the shaved beard on his face. This took him around an hour. When he checked himself in the mirror, his cheek was full of fine thick beard and couldn't help but laughed at himself.

On the way south, he reached Jinhua prefecture and arrived at the prefecture office. In this area, he found it hard to understand the southern accent. But it was good that he was dressed in military attire because people started talking to him in a more formal manner, which made him able to understand them much better. In his whole life, he's never had this much money before, so he kept ordering wine and drank to his heart's content.

The many different internal energies that he had were circulating throughout the meridians in his body, not a trace of it was leaving his body. When suddenly, an energy stream rushed towards his Dantian region making him dizzy, seeing

stars, and wanting to vomit. This was Mr. Black-White's qi. He felt the pain was even more unbearable than before. Whenever this happened, he only had to follow the method written by Ren WoXing on the iron panel and expel the qi out from the Dantian region. After the qi in the Dantian was emptied, then his qi would become smooth and he would feel vigorous immediately. If he followed this practice every time this happened, he knew that his energy would also increase by a level but he would also be deeper in trouble by one level. He was always upbeat in his thinking. "I already got my life back. Living for one more day, even for one more minute is already good." He calmed down straight away.

That afternoon, he entered the Xianxia mountain range. The area was rugged and as he went on, he got higher and higher and could see less and less smokes from the mountain people's habitation. He rode on for another 20 li and no house was around anymore. He knew straight away that he had made a mistake by going past the last inn so now he had to stay the night on the road with robbers around the area. The night was getting darker as he picked a fruit up and ate it. Then he spotted a small cave underneath the cliff. It looked dry and seemed as if there were not many bugs inside to bother him. So he tied his horse's rein on a tree and let it eat some grass, while he went to collect some dry grass to spread inside the cave.

He felt that the qi in his Dantian wasn't relaxed so he sat down to meditate. With more practice, Ren Woxing's divine martial art was going to get even harder to restrain and he was going to feel uncomfortable more often. When he finished meditating, his whole body felt relaxed and light. It was as if he was on a cloud. He then expelled the breath in his mouth, stood up, and smiled bitterly. "That day when I asked Chief Ren, how come he still wanted to learn the Art of Essence Absorbing when he already had "Sunflower Manual" in his possession, he didn't answer willingly. But now, I understand why. This Art of Essence Absorbing, after you

practiced it, you won't be able to give it up." After reaching this conclusion, he couldn't help but feel frightened. "I heard Master-wife said before about Miao people raising poisonous evil things. Even when they knew it was evil, it was hard to give up. If they don't use those poisonous bugs to harm people then the bugs would harm the host's body. In the future, will I become just like those Miao people?"

When he walked out of the cave, he saw a lot of stars in the sky and heard the chirping of insects. Suddenly, he heard people coming towards the mountain. It seemed that they're still quite far away but his internal energy allowed him to hear further. Immediately, he went to his horse, loosened its rein, hit its back to make the horse move into the cave. He then hid himself behind a tree. After some time, he heard the steps coming closer. The light from the stars allowed him to see many people with black gowns and yellow waistbands, walking along. From the outfits, he reckoned they were people from the Devil Sect. There were more than thirty people in the group and none of them spoke a word. Linghu Chong thought, "They seemed to be going south towards Fujian. I wonder if they have anything to do with my Huashan School. Have they received orders from Chief Ren to cause trouble for Master and Master-wife?" He waited until those people were gone far enough before he quietly followed.

After he had walked for several li, the mountain road became really steep. Then he saw the two mountain peaks besides each other with a very narrow mountain road going through the middle. It would be impossible for two people to go up side by side on this road. Those thirty people were climbing through the pass in a single file. Linghu Chong thought, "If I were to follow them up now, it's possible that once they reached the top, one of them might accidentally turn his head around and see me." So he quickly hid himself in the bushes to wait for them to finish climbing the slope and to start going down on the south slope before he started chasing again. But when these people reached the peak of

the slope, they suddenly scattered and hid themselves behind the mountain rocks. Not a single shadow was seen.

Linghu Chong was frightened. The first thing that entered his mind was, "They saw me." But he knew immediately that he was wrong. He considered further, "They're going to ambush people who will go up the slope. That must be it! This is the perfect place to plan an ambush. Whoever climbed up here would have trouble escaping. Who are they trying to ambush? If Master and Master-wife had gone back to the North, what urgent matter do they have to go back to Fujian that they would be walking through here at night? Will I see my little martial sister tonight?" As his thought turned to Yue Lingshan, his whole body became hot. He quietly stepped away from the bushes. After he had gained a bit of distance away from the mountaintop, he quickly dashed down from the mountain. After several bends, he turned around and couldn't see the mountain slope anymore. Then he headed back north away from the mountain pass. He scampered along the road while trying to listen if anyone was coming towards him. After 10 more li, he suddenly heard voices from a hillside on the left. "Linghu Chong is a dirty rascal. You're still defending him!"

# **Chapter 23: Ambush**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**



**Yilin turned around hurriedly and stuck out her hand. Linghu Chong reached over and held on to her hand. Yilin**



**pulled hard upwards, and after several embarrassing stumbles, Linghu Chong finally regained his balance. Several female apprentices behind him simply could not help giggling.**

Linghu Chong was alarmed to suddenly hear someone calling his own name on a desolated mountaintop in the middle of the night. His first thought was, "It's master!" But it was the voice of a female and it wasn't master-wife or Yue Lingshan. This outburst was followed by a softer and quieter female's voice, which he could not hear clearly. Linghu Chong went towards the hillside and saw the shadows of thirty-four people standing up. His heart turned sour. "Who scolded me? Is it really HuaShan School's party? If martial sister heard someone scolded me like that, I wonder how she would react?"

He lowered his body to hide beside a shrub on the side. He crouched and circled around the hillside to get closer to the group and hid himself behind a big tree. He heard a female's voice said, "Martial uncle, Martial brother Linghu is an upright and heroic..." Hearing this half sentence, the picture of a delicately pretty face came into his mind. His chest became slightly constricted as he realised that the person saying this was Yilin, the little nun from Heng-shan school. He was disappointed to learn that these people were not from Huashan School. As his mind was somewhere else, he missed the next two sentences said by Yilin. He only heard the sharp voice of the previous speaker saying angrily, "You still dare to argue with your elder? Then that letter from Mr. Yue of Huashan School is fake? Mr. Yue sent this letter to the entire realm, telling everyone that Linghu Chong had been expelled from HuaShan because he's involved with Devil Sect's people. What wrong can we do to him? When Linghu Chong saved you before, he probably wants to depend on this small favour to plot against us..."

"Martial uncle, it wasn't a small favor, Martial brother Linghu disregarded his own life..." answered Yilin.

"You're still calling him martial brother? This person is most probably a shrewd and wicked scheming thief. Putting on airs and deceiving young children like you. In Jiang Hu, there are all sorts of sly and crafty people, swindling young people like you

because you have never experienced meeting them," the elder shouted in reply.

Yilin answered, "How can disciple not listen to martial uncle's order? But.. but.. martial... Linghu ... " and the word "brother" wasn't said. She stiffly stood there enduring the lecture.

That elder asked, "But what?" Yilin appeared to be frightened and didn't dare to speak anymore.

"This is a message from SongShan's Alliance Chief Zuo. Devil Sect is conducting a large-scale operation in Fujian to rob the Lin family of Fuzhou of their Evil Resisting sword art. Alliance Chief Zuo wants the Five Mountains Sword Alliance to help in preventing the demon people from having the sword art manual. When great masters from the Five Mountains Sword Alliance stepped in, it is unavoidable that people will die without being buried. That child from FuZhou's Lin family has already entered Mr. Yue's school so it seemed that HuaShan School has obtained the sword art manual but actually they have not. We fear that the Devil Sect will have many traps. Also, when you add that ex-disciple of Huashan School, Linghu Chong, into the equation, our plight becomes even more unfavourable because the Devil sect may have inside information. Alliance Chief has put the responsibility of handling this matter on my shoulder and ordered me to lead us into Fujian. This matter concerns the fortune of both the orthodox and Devil Sect. We can't allow any careless or indiscreet acts. Thirty li from here is the border between Zhejiang and Fujian. Today, everyone has worked hard and had been hurrying along at night. We'll rest when we get to Nianbapu town. We'll then hurry along so we can be in front and wait for the Devil Sect people to launch their operation. By then, we would have waited at ease and have the advantage of waiting for an exhausted enemy. But you must still be on your guard," that elder announced. All the female disciples (numbering in scores of ten) complied with one voice.

Linghu Chong thought, "This master is in charge of this Heng-Shan School group and Yilin also called her martial uncle. I've heard of "Three Ding of Heng-Shan", she must be Dingjing Shi Tai<sup>7</sup>. She received my master's letter and thought that I'm a bad person. I can't blame her for thinking this way. She wanted

to get ahead but didn't know that Devil Sect people are already setting up an ambush in front. Luckily, I already knew, but how do I tell them about this?"

He then heard Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Once we enter Fujian's boundary, you must be on your guard. Everyone around you will be your enemy. Even the servants from the restaurants or the teahouses might be spies from the Devil Sect. The walls have ears, just like the bushes might have enemy hiding within. From now on, do not mention anything about the Evil Resisting sword art manual, Mr. Yue, Linghu Chong, and DongFang BiBai<sup>8</sup>."

The female disciples answered together, "Yes!"

Linghu Chong knew that Devil Sect's Chief DongFang BuBai's kungfu had no match in the world, which was why he was called undefeated. But when the orthodox schools talked about him, they frequently referred to him as "Bibai". They did this to nullify the meaning behind the enemy's name and to mock him. After hearing her mentioned his own name, his master's name and DongFang BuBai's on the same level, he couldn't help but laughed bitterly. "I'm just a nameless person while you're a senior from Heng-Shan School. You flatter me too much to mention my name in the same breath as my master's and Dongfang Bubai's."

Dingjing Shi Tai continued, "Everyone, let's go!" All the disciples answered in one voice and complied with the order. He then saw seven female disciples sped away from the hillside followed by another seven soon after. Heng-Shan School's qinggong was famous in the wulin world; the seven people in front and the seven people at the back kept the distance between them constant as they run, resembling a troop formation. The sleeves of the fourteen people were floating in the air and they were all synchronous in their running. It was extremely beautiful to look at. Not too long after that, another seven people started to go down the hill. In a short time, all of Heng-Shan School's groups have moved out. Altogether, there were six groups. The last group consisted of eight people, with the extra person being Dingjing Shi Tai. Some of these females were not nuns, but secular disciples of Heng-Shan.

In the darkness of the night, Linghu Chong wasn't able to recognise which group Yilin was in. He thought, "These disciples from Heng-Shan must each have their own unique skill. But when they're climbing that steep slope between the two peaks, the Devil Sect people will ambush them. They will definitely suffer heavy injuries and deaths."

He took a handful of green grass, squeezed them and smeared the juices on his face. Then he dug out some mud and smeared it on his face, hands and thick beard. Even if it were daytime, Yilin would not be able to recognise him under all the mud. Linghu Chong then circled the hillside to go back to the road and started chasing after them. Originally, his qinggong wasn't that good. But whether your qinggong was high or low was dependent on the strength of your internal energy level. Right now, his internal energy was high, so he could take a step as he willed and each step was also very far away. At this speed, he caught up with Heng-Shan School's people in no time at all. He was afraid that Dingjing Shi Tai might hear his footsteps as he came closer to them so he overtook them by running in a big circle. Once he was ahead of them and was back on the main road, he ran even faster. When he arrived at the bottom of the slope, the moon was already above his head. He stood there listening to his surrounding and did not hear a single sound. "If I didn't see the Devil Sect people setting up an ambush here, then a disaster would have happened at this place. A great disaster."

He slowly walked up the steep slope and arrived at the beginning of the road between the two peaks. He was around a li away from the ambush place; he sat down and started thinking, "The Devil Sect people have probably seen me here. But they're afraid to alert the enemy so they are just letting me sit here." After waiting for some time, he lied down on the ground. Finally, he heard faint steps coming up from the hillside. He thought, "It's best if I lead the Devil Sect's people to start fighting with me first. After fighting for a little bit, then Heng-Shan School will be aware." He then said angrily at the people on the top of the slope, "What old man hates the most is being stabbed in the back. Then I won't know whether they are real swords or spears. Stabbing in the back is a very rotten method. You hiding there,

get up! Evil ghosts, harming people by ambush! How contemptible and disgraceful." Although his voice wasn't loud, he had put an abundant of qi to deliver it, so it was able to travel far. He was guessing that the Devil Sect people had heard what he said. But who would have thought these people could really hold in their anger and unexpectedly did not pay attention to him at all. Not long after, Heng-Shan School's first group of seven disciples arrived in front of him.

Under the moonlight, the seven disciples could see an officer sleeping on the ground with his four limbs extended out. Only one person at a time can go up the mountain pass as it was flanked by high cliffs on both sides. Therefore, if they wanted to go up the slope, they have to step across his body first. These disciples only had to lightly jump to go across his body, but between man and woman, there must be a separation. In order to jump across, they also have to go over his head. This was just too rude.

A middle-aged nun said with a clear voice, "Excuse me, officer. Please lend us a path."

Linghu Chong made two "woo, woo" sounds snoring loudly. That nun's buddhist name was Yihe but her temper was not peaceful at all<sup>9</sup>. She saw that this officer was sleeping soundly in the middle of the road snoring so loudly that he must be deliberately pretending to be asleep. This made her all the more agitated. She held back her anger and said, "If you don't make way, we will jump over you." Linghu Chong kept up his loud snoring and muttered, "Lots of demons and ghosts on this road. Mustn't go through it. Woo... woo... the sea of bitterness is endless... turn... turn... turn around then you will see the beach." Yihe was startled when she heard this as his words seemed to carry two meanings. Another nun pulled Yihe back by tugging her sleeve and the seven nuns retreated several steps.

One person whispered, "Martial sister, this person is weird."

Another one said, "I'm afraid he might be Devil Sect's spy challenging us."

Another person said, "I don't think Devil Sect's people would go and get a government job as a military officer. I think he's

disguising himself. He didn't dirty his attire when he was disguising himself."

Yihe said, "Don't worry about him! He's not letting us get through so we'll jump over him."

Before she jumped, she asked again, "If you're really not making way then we just have to offend you."

Linghu Chong stretched out lazily and slowly got up. He was still afraid that Yilin might recognise him so he faced the hillside. The back of his body was facing the Heng-Shan School disciples. With his right hand leaning on the cliff face, his body swayed from side to side looking like a drunk. He said, "Good wine! good wine!" At this moment, the second group of Heng-Shan School disciples arrived.

"Martial sister Yihe, what's this person doing here?" asked a secular disciple.

"Who knows what he's doing here!" answered Yihe.

Linghu Chong said in a loud voice, "Just then I butchered a dog. My tummy's so full after eating it. I've also drunk a lot of wine. I'm afraid I might vomit. Aiyo, not good, really gonna vomit!" A vomiting sound was heard briefly.

The female disciples scowled and one by one retreated back. Linghu Chong made the vomiting sound a few more times although nothing was coming out. The disciples were discussing among themselves when the third group also arrived.

He heard a soft voice said, "This person is drunk, he's very pitiful. Let him rest, we can't be delayed."

When Linghu Chong heard this voice, his heart fluttered. He thought, "Martial sister Yilin has a very good heart."

But Yihe said, "This person is deliberately making a fuss here, he must have some bad intention!" She then took a step forward and shouted, "Make way!" While she pushed Linghu Chong's left shoulder. Linghu Chong swayed forward and shouted, "Aiyo, this is disastrous!" He took a few stumbling steps up the slope, staggering from side to side. After walking a few steps, the situation had become even more awkward. His body was now filling in the narrow pass completely. If it were not for the inappropriateness, the people behind him would have jumped

over his head to get pass. Yihe went forward and shouted, "Make way already!"

"Yes, yes," answered Linghu Chong. He took a few more steps up. He got even higher as he moved forward making the narrow pass even more difficult to pass. Suddenly he shouted very loudly, "Hello, friends above waiting to ambush, pay attention please! The people you're waiting for have arrived. You guys should come out now, no one here would be able to escape."

When Yihe and the other disciples heard of this, they immediately retreated back. One disciple said, "This place is really dangerous, if the enemy ambush us now, we'll have great difficulty in fighting back." Yihe said, "If there's someone waiting to ambush us, why is he calling them out? It's just empty threat, empty threat. There's nobody up there. If we retreat in fear, the enemy will laugh at us." Another two middle-aged nun said together, "Yeah! We three people will make way in front, martial sisters follow behind us." The three nuns pulled their long swords out and went forward towards Linghu Chong's back.

Linghu Chong continuously panted loudly and said, "This hillside road is very steep. Ai, old man is very old now. I can't go further."

One of the nuns said, "Hey, you go to one side and let us walk ahead first, is this ok?"

"Don't get angry. Walking fast will get us there, walking slow will also get us there. Hai.. Hai.. Ai, when going towards the gates of Hell, it is better to go slowly."

That nun said, "Why are you beating around the bush trying to scold people?"

With a shout, Yihe thrust her sword towards Linghu Chong's heart from behind. This thrust was only meant to scare him into making way for them. So when the sword was about to pierce his body, it stopped short. At this exact moment, Linghu Chong also turned his body around. He saw that the tip of the sword was pointed at his chest and shouted, "Hey! You... you... what are you doing? I'm a government official. Didn't expect that you dare to be this rude. Come people, seize these nuns!"

Some of the younger nuns couldn't help to hold in their laughter anymore. This person was on a desolated mountainside

but was still exhibiting a bureaucratic air. It was really comical.

A nun laughingly said, "Officer, we have an urgent matter and are hurrying along. Please move to a side and let us through."

"What officer, I'm a general. You should call me general. Then I'll let you through," said Linghu Chong.

Seven to eight female disciples laughingly said, "General, please make way."

Linghu Chong laughed and straightened up. He puffed up his chest and tucked in his stomach, looking arrogant. Suddenly, he slipped and fell on the ground. The female disciples squealed and called out in alarm, "Be careful." And two of them quickly held onto his arms. Linghu Chong slipped one more time before he stood firm. He then scolded, "His granny.... this ground is so slippery. The local government is a bucket of rice, unlike those common people<sup>10</sup>. They should keep the mountain road in good condition." He had already slipped twice and now he leaned his body against a small depression on the cliff wall. Heng-Shan School's disciples quickly used their qinggong to go through. One by one, they went past him swiftly.

One of them laughed, "The local government will send eight people with a sedan chair to carry general over this mountain range. That's the way to do it."

Another one said, "General rides a horse not a sedan chair."

The next one said, "This general is different than the others. When riding a horse, he's afraid that he might fall down on the ground."

Linghu Chong indignantly said, "Nonsense! How many times have I fallen down from riding a horse? Last month, that horse was scared to death by a tiger. Only then did I slid from the horse's back and injured my upper arm. So that one cannot be counted." The disciples laughed aloud while climbing the slope like wind.

Linghu Chong saw a slender body shook. It was Yilin. He immediately followed behind her, again blocking the disciples behind her. His steps were heavy and he was also panting heavily. For every three steps, he slipped two steps. He was climbing and falling at the same time. Fortunately, he was



actually walking quite quickly. The disciples behind were laughing and complaining at the same time. "You, general, is really... cough. Don't know how many times must you fall down in a day!"

Yilin turned her head and said, "Martial sister Yiqing, don't rush general. He's already trying to hurry, don't make him slip for real. This slope is really steep, falling down would be serious."

Linghu Chong saw her two big eyes. They were clear and bright like two clear fountains. Her elegant face shone under the moonlight looking very beautiful. He remembered the day when they were evading the pursuit of Qingcheng School. She carried him out from inside the city of Hengshan and he was staring at her right now just like he did at that time. Suddenly, he felt a soft and gentle feeling rising up in his heart. He thought, "At the top of this slope, there are many concealed enemies wanting to harm her. I don't care about my life but I must protect her and make sure she is safe."

Yilin saw his two eyes looking dull and his appearance ugly. She nodded slightly at him, revealing a warm and smiling countenance. She said, "Martial sister Yiqing, if General slipped and fell, you must quickly give him a hand."

Yiqing laughed, "He's very heavy, how do I help him?"

Originally, Heng-Shan School's rules were very strict. These female disciples did not easily chat and laugh with strangers. But Linghu Chong had been acting like a clown making them laugh repeatedly. Also, there were no elders around. As the dark night hurried along and after exchanging some harmless jokes, everyone was feeling livelier.

Linghu Chong indignantly said, "You girls are speaking without knowing what you're talking about. I'm a great general. Back in those days, in the battlefield, I routed and killed numerous thieves. The type of killing that makes you shiver with fear that the air around it would even be filled with a shimmering murderous aura. If you girls saw it, hey hey, you will admire me completely. This trivial mountain slope is nothing to look at for me. How can I fall down? You're talking rubbish... Aiyo, not good!"

His foot seemed to have stepped on a small stone and he fell down. He put both of his hands out waving them about trying to grab onto something. The disciples behind him yelped in surprise. Yilin quickly turned back and stuck her hand out to help him. Linghu Chong grabbed her hand and Yilin used all her strength to pull him upwards. Linghu Chong was now crouching down with his left hand on the ground supporting himself. He appeared to be very distressed. The disciples behind him were clutching their stomachs laughing loudly.

Linghu Chong said, "My leather boots are too heavy to use for climbing up mountain roads. If I were wearing your hemp shoes, then I guarantee I wouldn't fall down at all. Also, I'm only slipping and falling, what's so funny about that?"

Yilin slowly loosened her hand and said, "Yeah. General is wearing riding boots so it's not comfortable to climb up the mountain."

"Of course it's not comfortable. But with my very high prestige, I have to wear these boots. If I were just an ordinary common person like you people then I can wear those hemp shoes without any shame," said Linghu Chong. After hearing him trying to save face at all cost, the disciples all laughed again.

By now, a few more groups have arrived at the bottom of the slope while the first person who had gone up have reached the top of the slope.

Linghu Chong shouted, "This region has the most thieves, stealing chicken and dogs. They don't care at all if the weather is cold, they'll still come out to steal our money. Although you buddhists don't have too much wealth, be careful. Don't let them steal your hard earned alms money."

Yiqing giggled and said, "General is here, those thieves wouldn't dare to show their faces here."

Linghu Chong answered back, "Hey, hey, be careful. I see some people at the top lurking around."

One of the female disciples said, "General, you are talking nonsense. With us around you're still afraid of a few small time thieves?"

Just as she said this, two female disciples suddenly shouted, "Ai yo!" and rolled down the slope.

Two female disciples hastily went up and held them. From the front, a few of the female disciples shouted, "The thieves used some projectiles. Be careful!" As soon as they said this, another disciple rolled down the slope.

Yihe ordered in a loud voice, "Everyone get down! Be careful of projectiles!"

Everyone quickly crouched down while Linghu Chong scolded out loudly, "Bold thieves, you don't know that General is here?" Yilin was pulling his arm and worriedly implored, "Quickly get down!"

The disciples in front were shooting their metal bead projectiles from inside their sleeves. But the enemies on the hilltop had concealed themselves behind the rocks again. Not one could be seen. So their projectiles did not find their targets. Dingjing Shi Tai rushed forward when she heard that there was enemy at the top. She was jumping over the disciples' head to get ahead. When she arrived behind Linghu Chong, she also jumped over his head and kept going forward<sup>11</sup>.

Linghu Chong called out, "This is bad luck! Bad luck!" and spat out some saliva. He saw Dingjing Shi Tai waving her big sleeve around as she charged towards the hilltop. She was met by a rain of the enemy's projectiles. Some of the projectiles were trapped while some were knocked away flying by her sleeves.

Dingjing Shi Tai jumped a few more times and reached the top of the slope. Before she steadied herself, she felt a strong wind; a copper staff was coming towards her head. Hearing the sound of the staff cutting through the air, she knew that the strike was very heavy so she didn't dare to parry it. She dodged to the side of the staff, but at the same time saw two spears coming forward. One was aiming high and the other one low making the situation very dangerous. The enemy was holding an advantageous position by blocking the mountain pass with three good fighters. Dingjing Shi Tai shouted, "Shameless!" while pulling out her long sword. Her sword slashed at the two spears and broke them, while the copper staff was swept at her waist. She countered by hitting the top of the staff with her sword to change its direction. Just then, another spear was thrust towards her right shoulder. The female disciples on the slope started to

scream in surprise and large crashing sounds were heard. Apparently the enemies on the hilltop were pushing big rocks down the slope. Heng-Shan School's disciples were crowded in the middle of the pass. They were jumping and crouching to avoid the rocks from hitting them, but soon after some of them was hit and got injured.

Dingjing Shi Tai retreated back two steps and ordered, "Everyone turn back! Go back down the hill and regroup!"

She wielded her sword to prevent the enemy from going down but the enemy still managed to continuously toss more rocks down the slope. Then she heard the sounds of fighting coming from below. Apparently, enemies were also waiting for them at the bottom of the slope to prevent them from retreating.

Someone shouted from below, "Martial uncle, the martial art of the enemies cutting off our escape are strong. We can't go down."

Another one shouted, "Two martial sisters are injured."

Dingjing Shi Tai angrily flew down. She saw two men wielding sabres preventing two disciples at the back from retreating down the hill. Dingjing Shi Tai cried out and attacked using her sword. Suddenly she heard two "hu, hu" sounds; two small hammers connected by a long chain were flying down vertically attacking the front of her body. Dingjing Shi Tai lifted her sword to block one of the meteor hammers while the other one went through and almost hit her head. Dingjing Shi Tai was startled, "Great power." If they were on flat ground, she wouldn't have used her sword to block the hammer. She would have instead launched an attack from the side. But the mountain pass was too narrow and there was only two ways to go; which was either up or down. The enemy twirled his meteor hammers quickly and the hammers, looking like two black clouds, came hurtling towards Dingjing Shi Tai. Dingjing Shi Tai was unable to use her clever sword art against him so she retreated step-by-step back towards the hilltop.

From above, she heard the cries of the disciples and saw some of them falling down on the ground after being hit by projectiles. Dingjing Shi Tai calmed herself down and thought to herself that the enemies' martial art were weaker at the hilltop

and should be easier to deal with. So she quickly rushed back up and jumped over some of the disciples and also passed over Linghu Chong's head.

Linghu Chong called out to her, "Aiyo, what are you doing? Do you think you're jumping over a chicken here? You're already so old but still joking around, jumping over my head to go here and there. Do you think I can still gamble after this?"

Dingjing Shi Tai was hurrying trying to break through the enemy's trap so she didn't hear those words. But Yilin apologised, "Sorry, my martial uncle didn't do it on purpose." Linghu Chong grumbled and complained, "I already said earlier that there were thieves here. But none of you believed me." But in his heart, he was thinking, "I saw earlier that the Devil Sect people were setting up an ambush on the hilltop, but apparently they also have people at the bottom. Even though Heng-Shan School has many people here, they're all crowded in the middle of this narrow pass. So they can't display their skills. The situation is not encouraging at all."

When Dingjing Shi Tai arrived at the hilltop, she suddenly saw the shadow of a stick moving. A Buddhist steel staff was coming towards her head. The enemies have adjusted so that their better skilled people were now fighting her. Dingjing Shi Tai thought, "Today, if I don't manage to break through this pass, I'm afraid these disciples will be annihilated." She leaned to one side and thrust her sword out in an angle. The Buddhist staff missed her body by only a few inches. She then shot forward and plunged her sword towards the monk. In making this move, she disregarded her own life, as it was potentially disastrous to both people. That monk tried hard to protect himself but it was too late. He scoffed lightly as the sword pierced the side of his body. But that monk was extremely brave. Uttering a cry, he broke the long sword in two with his fist. His fist was bloodied as it hit the sword.

Dingjing Shi Tai shouted, "Quickly get up here! Give me a sword!"

Yihe flew up and held her sword horizontally. She shouted, "Martial uncle, sword!" Dingjing Shi Tai turned her body around to take the sword. But a spear was thrust slantingly towards Yihe,

while another spear was thrust towards Dingjing Shi Tai. Yihe had to use her sword to ward off the attack which allowed the spear wielding person to close in on her bit by bit. This also forced Yihe to retreat back down the slope. With this happening, Yihe wasn't able to pass the sword to Dingjing Shi Tai. In the mean time, three people charged onto the hilltop, two with sabres and the other one with a judge's pen, surrounding Dingjing Shi Tai. Dingjing Shi Tai's two palms were flitting about using Heng-Shan School's "Tian Zhang Zhang Fa" (Heaven's Palm) to ward off the attack from the four people. She was already around sixty years old but her hands were still agile. Unexpectedly, she was holding her own using only her bare hands even though the four masters from the Devil Sect were fighting cooperatively against her.

Yilin was frightened and whispered, "Ai yo! What do I do? What do I do?"

Linghu Chong said with a loud voice, "These small time thieves are too unruly. Make way! Make way! General is going up there to capture these thieves!"

Yilin worriedly said, "You mustn't go! They're not small time thieves. All of them have good martial art. If you go up there then they'll kill you."

Linghu Chong puffed up his chest and shouted boldly, "Under a sunny day... " He then raised his head up to the sky; it was almost daybreak, but it wasn't a "sunny day". But he didn't care and continued, "These small time thieves are cutting off the road and plundering people. Bullying women. Hng, hng, aren't they afraid of the law?"

"We're not ordinary women. Enemies are also not small time thieves cutting off the road and plundering people," said Yilin.

Linghu Chong took a big step going up the slope. He squeezed through the female disciples to go up. The female disciples were staying close to the side of the cliff face and allowed him to go up.

When Linghu Chong reached the hilltop, he extended his hand to pull out his Yaodao sabre. As a fraction of the sabre was pulled out, he suddenly stopped and pretended that he couldn't pull the sabre out anymore. He scolded, "Your granny, this sabre is looking for trouble. When an important matter comes up, it

suddenly becomes rusted. How can General capture thieves with a rusted sabre?"

Yihe was fighting for her life against one of the Devil Sect's people on the hilltop when she heard Linghu Chong behind her talking nonsense about his sword rusting and why he couldn't pull out his sword. She was angry but also found it funny. She shouted, "Quick! Go away! It's dangerous up here." As she called out, she lost her concentration slightly and her defense wasn't as tight. With a fierce sound, a spear was thrust forward and nearly hit her shoulder. Yihe retreated half a step while that person thrust his spear again.

Linghu Chong shouted, "That's wrong, that's wrong! Bold thieves, don't you see General standing right here?" In a flash, he slanted his body and was in front of Yihe. The spear wielding man was startled. As the sky was gradually becoming brighter, he was able to see his clothes were like those that government officials wear. Just at that moment, even though his spear was pointing at the officer's chest, he didn't thrust it forward. He shouted, "Who are you? Before this, someone was calling out from the bottom of the hill. Was it you, government dog?"

Linghu Chong rebuked, "Your granny, are you calling me a government dog? You're a thief dog! You're here cutting off the road and plundering. And even though General is here, you still haven't run away. You're the real outlaw! After General has captured you, I'm going to send you to the local authority. With fifty planks each, you all are going to be beaten until your bottom is swollen and you are calling out for your mommy!" The spear-wielding man didn't want to kill a government official. But he was greatly annoyed and shouted, "Scram you rotten egg! If you talk nonsense again, I'll poke three holes through your government dog's body!"

Linghu Chong saw Dingjing Shi Tai had not been defeated yet and the Devil Sect people had stopped shooting projectiles and throwing rocks down the slope. He shouted, "Bold thieves, quickly kneel down and kowtow. If General sees your eighty years old mother in your home, then maybe I'll go easy on you. If not, hng, hng, I'll chop everyone's head off... .."

When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard this, they all scowled and shook their heads. They all had the same thought, "This person is crazy." Yihe walked up a step with her sword up. If the enemy thrust his spear towards the General, then it's going to be easier for her to block it. Linghu Chong used his strength to pull out his sabre again and then scolded, "Your granny, just before battle, my precious sabre from my ancestor has suddenly become rusted. Hng, if only my precious sabre were not rusted, all of your small time thieves' heads would've been chopped off."

That man wielding the spear laughed loudly and shouted, "Go back to your mum!" He then swept his spear towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong was hit and pushed down but at the same time he pulled out his sheath. He shouted, "Ai yo!" and pushed his body forward. Yihe shouted, "Be careful!" As Linghu Chong was falling down, he held his sheathed sabre out and used the point of his sheath to hit the spear wielding man's side of the small of the back.

That man dropped to the ground wordlessly. With a slapping sound, Linghu Chong also fell to the ground. Then as he struggled to get up, he shouted, "Ah ha! You also fell down. We've both fallen down. I'm not going to concede defeat. Come on, we fight again!" Yihe grabbed that man and threw him behind. She was thinking that now she had captured an enemy, things would become easier. Another three Devil Sect people came over to save that person. Linghu Chong called out, "Ah Ha, this is disastrous, these small time thieves are really going to refuse being captured."

Linghu Chong raised his sheathed sabre to the west and his finger on the other hand was pointed to the east. It was completely unmethodical. Dugu Nine Swords didn't have any set moves so when it was used, it can be either graceful or clumsy and awkward, but strangely still maintaining the same power. This was because Dugu Nine Swords concentrated on the sword intention not set moves.

He was now thrusting his sword towards an enemy's various accupoints without any great force. During a fight, it would be difficult to accurately hit people's accupoints. But a refined sword art with vigorous internal energy attached to the strike, even if it



wasn't that accurate, might still perhaps hit the side of the accupoints. So considering this, the enemy in front of him continuously protected himself following Linghu Chong's sheathed sabre wherever it went.

At the same time, Linghu Chong was staggering, looking like he was about to fall down, and waving his sheathed sabre about. When suddenly, the point of the scabbard hit that enemy's stomach. That person gasped and went limp. Linghu Chong yelled, "Ah Ha!" and jumped back a step. At the same time, his sword handle hit the back of another enemy's shoulder. That person immediately fell down and swayed back and forth on the ground. Linghu Chong continued to step back and tripped on that person's body. He scolded him, "Your granny!" and kicked his body away.

Then his sword handle inadvertently hit a Devil Sect person wielding a sabre. This person was one of the three masters besieging Dingjing Shi Tai. The back of his body was hit and he dropped his sword. Dingjing Shi Tai took this opportunity to hit his chest making that person sprout blood from his mouth and life fled from his body.

Linghu Chong called out, "Careful, careful!" While he retreated a few steps and was about to bump into the back of the person holding the judge's pen. That person quickly sent his pen back to protect himself. Linghu Chong staggered and dashed forward while waving his scabbard around. Soon, more Devil Sect people were hit and fell down.

That person wielding the judge's pen was greatly annoyed and rushed at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong yelled, "Mommy!" as he pulled up and ran away with that person pursuing him. Linghu Chong suddenly stopped and bent his waist forward; while at the same time poked his sword handle through his armpit. That person never expected him to be able to run so fast and suddenly stopped motionless in an instant. Although his martial art was already high, he was still inferior. He quickly applied a downward force to stop, but his chest was still hit by Linghu Chong's extended sword handle. That person's face showed an extremely odd expression. He couldn't believe what just happened. But his body had slowly started to fall down.

Linghu Chong turned around and saw the fighting on the hilltop had ceased. A few of the Heng-Shan School's disciples had already gone up the slope. Both the orthodox and Devil Sect people were now facing each other while the remaining disciples were quickly rushing up the slope. He shouted, "Hey, small time thieves, you've seen General here. Quickly kneel down and surrender. Really strange!" He then started to dance his sheathed sabre around, cried out and charged towards the cluster of Devil Sect people. The Devil Sect people quickly sent out their swords and spears.

Heng-Shan School disciples were about to go forward and help when they heard Linghu Chong shouted, "Skillful! Skillful! Very fierce thieves!" and he came out from the cluster of Devil Sect people. His steps were heavy and he was dragging his feet through the mud as he ran. He missed a step and fell down. His scabbard shot up and hit his own forehead making him dizzy. But he had already managed to hit five people as he entered and exited the cluster of Devil Sect people. Both groups were dumbfounded looking at him.

Both Yihe and Yiqing rushed forward and asked, "General, are you alright?"

Both of Linghu Chong's eyes were closed. He didn't answer them pretending to have passed out. The leader of the Devil Sect group saw that one person had died and this lunatic general had hit eleven of his people. Just now, when the General charged at his party, he made his moves one after another to grab the General. But all of his moves ended up with him in danger of being hit by the scabbard. Although the scabbard was not attacking any accupoints, it was coming in swift and fierce with its weird positioning. He didn't know this person's background but sensed that his martial art was high and its true depth couldn't be measured.

He then saw the people who had been hit; the Heng-Shan School had now captured five of them. Today, everything had gone pear-shaped. He shouted with a clear voice, "Dingjing Shi Tai, do you want the antidotes for your disciples who got hit by the projectiles?"

Dingjing Shi Tai already saw that those disciples who got hit by the projectiles fell into a coma and couldn't be woken up. The injuries made by the projectiles were also leaking black blood. She knew that the projectiles were poisoned. When she heard his words, she already had a clear idea of what to do. She shouted, "Give us the antidotes in exchange for your people!" That person nodded his head and muttered something under his breath. One of the Devil Sect people took out a porcelain bottle and stood in front of Dingjing Shi Tai and bowed slightly. Dingjing Shi Tai took the bottle and fiercely said, "If the antidote is effective then I'll release them myself."

That old person said, "Alright. Heng-Shan's Dingjing Shi Tai, I'm not the kind of person who eats his own words." He waved his hand and the Devil Sect people went down the west slope taking their injured and dead people with them. A short time later, all of them had left the hilltop leaving their five captured comrades.

After a long time, LingHu Chong woke up and called out, "Ouch, hurts so much!" as he rubbed his swollen forehead. Then with a surprised tone, he asked, "Where did all those thieves go?" YiHe giggled and said, "General, you're really strange. Just then, it was lucky that you somehow hit a number of them when you charged at their group. The leader of those small-time thieves was truly frightened by you."

LingHu Chong laughed loudly and said, "Wonderful, wonderful! Big general has such a big reputation. When I ride out to confront these small-time thieves of course it's a different matter altogether. They would certainly run away with their tails between their legs. Ai yo..." Then he rubbed his swollen forehead again with his face showing a painful expression.

"General, have you been injured? We have some medicine," said YiQing.

LingHu Chong answered proudly, "No, no, I'm not injured! When a gentleman dies in the battlefield ("Ma Ge Li Shi"\*), it's a common thing..."

YiHe pursed her lips smiling and said, "I'm afraid it's "Ma Ge Guo Shi"\*, how can it be "Ma Ge Li Shi"\*?"

YiQing gave her a stern look and said, "You always love to find other people's fault, what's the point of pointing out his

fault?"

LingHu Chong said, "We people from the north learns "Ma Ge Li Shi", you southern people must have learnt it differently."

YiHe turned her head and said, "But we're also from the north." [12](#)

Master Dingjing went to the injured disciples and gave them the antidote for the poison. When she reached LingHu Chong, she bowed to him and said, "I am Heng-Shan's old nun Dingjing. May I ask for young hero's name?"

Linghu Chong's heart shivered in fear, "This Heng-Shan School senior really has good eyesight. She knows that I'm still young and also that I'm actually a brave general."

He immediately bowed and clasped his fist respectfully returning the bow. He said, "As Shi Tai requested, my surname is Wu. My name is Tiande. Tian from "Tian En Hao Dang" (enormous graciousness). De from "Dao De Wen Zhang" (Morality)[13](#). I'm going to Quanzhou government office to take up office."

Dingjing Shi Tai already expected that he wouldn't reveal his real identity and he might not necessarily be a real general. She said, "Today, my Heng-Shan School has met difficulty and General has helped us. I don't know how to repay your virtue and kindness. General's martial art is very deep. Although poor nun has taken a look at it, I still don't know which school General comes from. Really admirable."

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "Old Shi Tai flatters me. But to be honest, my martial art has a few foundations. On the top "Snow falling from the sky", at the bottom "Ancient tree root", in the middle "Black tiger stealing heart"..... Ai yo, ai yo." As he was talking, his hands and feet were moving about showing off the martial art moves. It looked like that he had used too much force in his demonstration and had strained himself. He rubbed his aching joints while his eyes stole a look towards Yilin.

She was startled and for a moment it looked as if she had something to say. He thought, "My martial sister has a really good conscience. I wonder how she will react if she knew I am the general."

Naturally, Dingjing Shi Tai was aware that he was pretending. She smiled and said, "General doesn't want to reveal himself

since he's an honorable man. Poor nun can only burn the incense stick from morning till dusk to pray for General's good fortune and health. Best wishes to General."

Linghu Chong said, "Thank you very much, thank you very much. Please pray to Buddha for my promotion and wealth. Little general will also pray for the safety of old Shi Tai and all the little Shi Tai on your journey, for bad luck to turn into good, and for all matters to go smoothly. HaHa! HaHa!" As he was laughing loudly, he bowed deeply to Dingjing Shi Tai and swaggered away.

He had been in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance for a long time, so even though he was pretending to be crazy, he still didn't dare to be inappropriate towards this senior from Heng-Shan School. The school disciples were now looking at him stumbling towards the south slope. As he disappeared, they quickly surrounded Dingjing Shi Tai and started to barrage her with questions: "Martial uncle, what's his background?" "Is he really insane or is he just pretending?" "Is his martial art very high, or was he merely lucky and mistakenly hit the enemies here and there?" "He doesn't resemble a general. He still looks young, am I right?"

Dingjing Shi Tai sighed and turned her head to look at the disciples injured by the projectiles. After the medicine was applied to their wounds, the black blood had turned red and their pulses strengthened. They were no longer in danger. She then gave Heng-Shan School's unique medicine to each of the disciples to administer it to their own injuries. After that she released the acupoints of the five captured Devil Sect people and told them to leave.

She then ordered the disciples, "Everyone go under that tree to rest", while she went alone and sat on a big stone. She closed her eyes and pondered, "When this person charged at the Devil Sect group, the leader of the group fought with him. But he still managed to hit five of their people. He wasn't using a martial art that aimed at the acupoints. He was using some martial art style but I didn't expect that there was not even a slight demonstration of his school's martial art. In Wulin, there must be such a young person who's that skilful. But whose disciple is he?

This person was a friend and not an enemy. This is really Heng-Shan School's big fortune."

At mid-morning, she ordered the disciples to fetch a brush, an ink stone, and a thin silk to write a letter. She ordered, "Yizhi, bring the pigeon here." Yizhi answered and took a pigeon out of the bamboo cage she was carrying. In the mean time, Dingjing Shi Tai rolled up the thin silk letter into a thin strip and put it in a slender bamboo tube. She put the cover on and sealed it with melted wax. Then using an iron wire, she put the bamboo tube on the pigeon's left feet. After a silent prayer, she released the pigeon. The pigeon flew north, gradually going higher and further. Not long after, it was only a black dot in the sky.

After Dingjing Shi Tai released the pigeon, everyone became quiet, completely different from before when they were vigorously fighting the enemies. Dingjing Shi Tai raised her head to look up. She saw the black dot entering a white cloud and disappeared, but she continued to look into the distance. All the disciples didn't dare to make any sound. At the recent battle, although that clown general was jesting around and acting comical, the situation in actuality was really dangerous. It can be said that everyone had now escaped death. After standing there for a long time, Dingjing Shi Tai turned around and beckoned forward a fifteen or sixteen years old girl. The girl immediately went and stood in front of her.

She quietly called out, "Master!"

Dingjing Shi Tai lightly brushed the girl's hair to comfort her and said, "Juan'er, were you scared before?"

The young girl nodded and said, "I was scared! Lucky that General was brave and fought those bad people off."

Dingjing Shi Tai smiled and said, "This General wasn't really brave but his martial was really good."

"Master, is his martial art really that high? I saw his moves were erratic and he was really careless. He even hit his head with his own scabbard. Also he was saying something like his saber was rusting and couldn't pull it out of the scabbard?" said that girl unbelieving.

This young lady Qin Juan was Dingjing Shi Tai's disciple. She was clever and bright, and she was really loved by her master.

Between the Heng-Shan School disciples, sixty percent of the disciples were nuns, while the rest were secular disciples. Some of these disciples were middle aged and there were also fifty to sixty year old grannies. Qin Juan was the youngest disciple in the Heng-Shan School.

The other disciples heard Dingjing Shi Tai conversing with martial sister Qin Juan so they slowly gathered around. Yihe interposed herself and said, "What do you mean that his moves were erratic? He was just pretending and was actually concealing his excellent martial art. That is called smart! Martial uncle, what do you think of this General's background? Which house or school is he from?"

Dingjing Shi Tai slowly shook her head and said, "This person's martial art might be "immeasurably deep". I don't know how else to describe him except with these two words."

Qin Juan asked, "Master, was that letter for martial uncle? Do you think it will get there soon?"

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "When the pigeon gets to Suzhou's Baiyi Temple, they will exchange it with another pigeon. At Ji'nan Miaoxiang Temple, they will change to another pigeon. Again at the mouth of the old river at Qingjing Temple, they will use another pigeon. The letter will arrive in Hengshan after the use of these four pigeons."

Yihe said, "Fortunately we didn't lose anyone. I believe those several martial sisters who got hit by the projectiles won't be a big hindrance after two days. While those who got hit by the rocks, we also don't have to worry about them losing their lives."

Dingjing Shi Tai was lost in her own thoughts so she didn't hear what Yihe just said. She was thinking, "Currently, Heng-Shan School's position and movement in the south is a secret. We've been sleeping during the day and travelling at night. How did the Devil Sect people find out and managed to setup an ambush here?" She then turned her head towards the disciples and said, "The enemies have disappeared and wouldn't dare to come back right now. Everyone is now very tired so we'll eat some provisions here and then sleep for a while under that tree's shade." Everyone complied with her order. Some people erected

an iron trivet to boil some water for brewing tea. After eating their meal, they slept for a few hours till around noon.

Dingjing Shi Tai looked at the weary expressions of the injured disciples. She said, "The enemies have discovered our movements so there's no need for us to travel at night anymore. Those injured must also recuperate. Tonight, we'll rest at an Inn in Nianbapu."

They went down the hill and, after several hours, reached Nianbapu. It was an important location for transportation between Zhejiang and Fujian province for people travelling through the Xianxia mountain range. As they neared the small town, the sky had not darkened yet. Unexpectedly, there was not a single person inside the small town.

Yihe said, "Fujian's custom is really weird. It's still so early but everyone went to sleep already."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Let's go further to get lodgings for the night."

Even though Heng-Shan School has contact with every temple in Wulin, there was no temple to stay in at Nianbapu so they had to find an inn to spend the night. It was inconvenient that normal people had a taboo against nuns and frequently caused trouble because they believe that seeing nuns brought them bad luck. It was good that the nuns were accustomed to receiving this kind of treatment and never held a grudge. But now they saw all the stores on the street were closed and boarded up. Nianbapu was neither big nor small, but it had around two hundred stores and inns. But as they looked around, the town resembled a ghost town. The setting sun was still providing some light but Nianbapu's streets were deserted as if it were in the middle of the night.

The disciples were on the street looking around when they noticed a white cloth hanging on a pole in front of an inn. The words "Xian An Inn" were written in big letters on the cloth. The inn's big door was shut and there was no sound at all on the street. One of the disciples named Zheng E knocked on the door. Zheng E was a secular disciple. She had a round face and was always carrying a smile. She was good at talking and very likeable. Whenever the nuns had to deal with people on the road,



Zheng E was always the one to do it. This was to prevent other people from seeing nuns and becoming agitated. Zheng E knocked on the door a few times, stopped a while and then knocked a few more times. After waiting for a long time, no one answered the door. Zheng E called out, "Uncle, please open the door." Her voice was clear and carried far, just like people who have practised martial art. Even people several courtyards away would be able to hear it. But there was no answer from inside the inn. The situation was clearly very strange. Yihe went forward and put her ear on the door. No sound could be heard from the inside. She turned her head and said, "Martial uncle, there's no one inside."

Dingjing Shi Tai secretly felt something wasn't right. She saw the sign for the inn was still new. The door's board had also been washed clean recently. It didn't look like a place that had gone out of business at all. She said, "We'll keep going and take a look around. This town must have more than one inn."

They kept walking forward and passed several more shops before they saw another inn named "Nan An Inn". Zheng E went to knock on the door again but the result was still the same. No one answered.

Zheng E said, "Sister Yihe, let's go in and take a look."

"Ok," answered Yihe and they both jumped the wall to go in.

"Anyone here?" asked Zheng E.

When no one answered, they pulled their swords out and walked into the main hall of the inn. They took a look around the kitchen, the barn and every room in the inn. But they still didn't see anyone. But they observed that there was no dust on the table or the chairs. Also, the teapot on top of a table was still warm. Zheng E opened the main door to let Dingjing Shi Tai enter and to report the situation. Everyone thought that the situation was really strange.

Dingjing Shi Tai commanded, "Get seven people into a group. Go around the town and ask what's going on. Don't go too far, if you see signs of enemies then whistle out."

They acknowledged her order and quickly went out the door. Only Dingjing Shi Tai remained inside the main hall. Before long, the sounds of the disciples' footsteps have disappeared and no

more sound was heard. The stillness of this Nianbapu town made the hair at the back of Dingjing Shi Tai's neck to stand up. The town was so big but not a sound was heard. There was not even a small sound of birds chirping or dogs barking. This was really strange.

Dingjing Shi Tai suddenly felt uneasy. "Could it be that this is the Devil Sect's trap? The female disciples don't have much experience travelling the Jianghu. They might be deceived and can easily fall into a trap." She walked to the door and saw shadows moving in the northeast. From the west, she also saw some people moving into other people's houses. They were all Heng-Shan School's disciples. She felt slightly relieved after seeing them. After some time, the disciples started to return. They all reported the same thing: there was no one in the town.

"Not just people, we also couldn't see any animals around," added Yihe.

Yiqing said, "I think they haven't been gone for too long. There were opened chests and baskets inside the houses. They seemed to have taken all the money."

Dingjing Shi Tai nodded and asked, "What do you think is going on?"

Yihe answered, "I'm guessing that the Devil Sect people have chased out all the townspeople just recently to launch an attack."

"Correct! This time the Devil Sect wants to fight us again. That's very good, are you all scared?" said Dingjing Shi Tai.

"Eradicating evil is our inherent responsibilities as Buddhists," the disciples answered together.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "We'll rest at this inn. We'll take our meals first. Be careful and see if the water, rice, or vegetables have been poisoned."

Heng-Shan School people did not speak while taking their meals. They were on alert and tried to listen for any sound from the outside. The first disciple to finish eating went out to relieve the disciple guarding outside. Yiqing suddenly thought of something and said, "Martial uncle, why don't we go out to some of the houses and light up the lamps in there. The Devil Sect people won't know our whereabouts."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "This idea is very good. You seven people go and light up the lamps."

Not long after, Dingjing Shi Tai also went out the main door. She looked towards the west and lights were showing through the windows of many houses. After some time, lights came on from the houses in the east. The street lit up with lights from the windows. But there was still no sound to be heard. Dingjing Shi Tai raised her head and looked at the moon. She prayed, "Buddha, bless and protect us. Let my Heng-Shan School disciples escape from harm this time. If disciple Dingjing can go back to Heng-Shan, then I will light up an incense and won't use my sword ever again."

In her former years, she had roamed Jianghu and had many imposing achievements under her belt. But after last night's battle on Xianxia mountain range, she had lingering fear on her mind for the disciples under her command. If she were by herself, even if the situation had been ten times more dangerous, she would not even worry about it. She prayed again, "Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin, if Heng-Shan School people must receive injuries, let disciple Dingjing alone received that disaster for retribution for killing people. Let disciple alone bear this."

Suddenly, she heard a female's voice shouting from the northeast. "Help, help!" The shrill voice sounded sorrowful. Dingjing Shi Tai was alarmed. The voice did not sound like any of her school's disciples. She squinted her eyes looking towards the northeast and did not see any movement. She then saw Yiqing and six disciples went towards the northeast. She waited where she was watching what was going on. After a long time, Yiqing and her group still had not came back.

Yihe said, "Martial uncle, disciple and six disciple sisters will go to take a look."

Dingjing Shi Tai nodded her head. Yihe quickly led six disciples and went away to investigate. Suddenly, the flashing of a sword appeared briefly and the same female's voice was heard shrieking. "Someone's murdered! Help, help!" Heng-Shan School disciples crowded together to have a look. They did not know what was going on there. The voice originated from where Yiqing and Yihe's two groups had gone before. Seemed like they had

met the enemies but there was no sound of fighting. They then heard that female's voice shrilly shouting again, "Help!" Everyone looked at Dingjing Shi Tai waiting for her to command them to go and help.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Yu Sao, take six disciple sisters to check that area. No matter what you see, you must immediately come back."

Yu Sao was a forty years old middle-aged woman. She was originally Dingxian Shi Tai's servant from Hengshan's Baiyun Temple. Later, Dingxian Shi Tai saw that she was capable and accepted her as a disciple. This trip with Dingjing Shi Tai was her first experience in Jianghu. Yu Sao bowed to comply with Dingjing Shi Tai's order. Then she took six disciple sisters to go towards the northeast.

But none of these seven people came back either. Dingjing Shi Tai became more frightened suspecting that the disciples had fallen into the enemy's trap; enticed by the enemy and captured one by one. They waited for a while longer but there was not the slightest bit of movement and there were no more calls for help either.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Yizhi, Yizhen, wait here and tend to the injured sisters. No matter what happens, you mustn't leave the inn so as to prevent the enemy from luring you out."

Yizhi and Yizhen bowed acknowledging the order. Dingjing Shi Tai said to the three young disciples Zheng E, Yilin and Qin Juan, "You three come with me," while pulling out her long sword and starting out to the northeast. When they got nearer, they saw a big house where the lamps have been extinguished. The area was dark and no sound was heard.

Dingjing Shi Tai fiercely shouted, "Devil Sect witch, come out and fight. What kind of heroic deeds is it ambushing people like this?"

After waiting for a while, they still did not hear anyone answering from inside the house. So Dingjing Shi Tai flew and kicked the main door of the big house. The door latch broke and the door banged opened. It was dark inside the house and Dingjing Shi Tai could not tell if there was anyone in there so she didn't dare to rashly charge in.

She inquired, "Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao, do you hear my voice?" Her voice was loud and it travelled far. She then heard her echo from somewhere far. Once the echo died out, the place was completely quiet again. Dingjing Shi Tai turned her head around and said, "The three of you follow behind me closely." She brandished her sword as she went around the outside of the house but didn't find anything unusual. So she jumped on top of the house and squinted her eyes to look around the four directions.

There was no wind at all and the tree branches were still. The cold moon's light shone on the tiles. The scenery was just like that in Hengshan when she was strolling beneath the moon. But in Hengshan, there was a feeling of tranquillity while in this place, there was a feeling of surreptitiousness and murderous air. Dingjing Shi Tai was using her whole body to sense her surrounding but she hadn't been able to sense the enemy so far. She was really at a loss. She was feeling anxious and regretted, "I already knew that the Devil Sect demons would have many deceptions. I shouldn't have sent them in turns..." Suddenly, she shivered in fear and clapped her hands while going down the house. She quickly used her qinggong to run back towards the Nan An Inn. She called out, "Yizhi, Yizhen, have you seen anything?" No one answered from inside the inn.

She rushed in with cold sweat drenching her body but there was no one inside the inn. The couch that the injured disciples were sleeping on had also disappeared. At this point, Dingjing Shi Tai thought carefully but she had run out of idea. The shadow casted by her sword point was quivering as reflected lights from her sword flickered around the room. Her hand holding the sword was shaking. Her female disciples had suddenly disappeared without making any noise. How did this all happen? What's there to do? After a moment, she felt her lips dried, her tongue parched, and her whole body drained of energy. She felt paralyzed.

But this weakness was only momentary, as she took a deep breath and gathered her qi in the Dantian region. With her vigor immediately restored, she quickly went from room to room. She found nothing unusual in those rooms. She called out, "E'er,

Juan'er, come in here." But in the midst of the night, she could only hear her own voice. There was no sound from Zheng E, Qin Juan and Yilin. Dingjing Shi Tai muttered, "Not good!" and quickly rushed out. Once she was outside, she shouted, "Zheng E, Qin Juan, Yilin, where are you?"

Outside, the pale moon was shining down and there was no trace of the three disciples. Dingjing Shi Tai wasn't frightened by this turn of event but turned angry instead. She jumped up the roof and shouted, "Devil Sect demons, what type of cheap tactic is this? What kind of win is this, ambushing people?" She cried out repeatedly. But all the area around her was very quiet and not a single sound was heard. As she was continuously calling out, it seemed that she was the only remaining person inside the Nianbapu town. There was nothing she could do. Suddenly, she shouted with a clear voice, "Devil Sect demons, listen to me. You still don't want to appear? So, Dongfang Bubai's disciples are shameless and gutless. You don't dare to face me and my school's people. What Dongfang Bubai? It's merely Dongfang Bibai. Dongfang Bibai, do you dare to come out and meet this old nun? Dongfang Bibai, Dongfang Bibai, I think you're afraid!"

She knew that when any Devil Sect people heard someone insulting their Chief's reputation then they would have to come out and risk their lives in defending it. This was a big matter for them. Sure enough, after she called out a few "Dongfang Bibai", seven people rushed out from inside a house. They quietly jumped on the roof and surrounded her. Dingjing Shi Tai felt happy now that the enemies had appeared. She thought, "Finally, you demons have come out after being scolded by me. Wanting to cut me up and cut my corpse in two. This is better than not seeing their shadows at all." But these seven people just stood there without saying anything.

Dingjing Shi Tai angrily asked, "Where's my disciples? Where have you taken them?" Her enemies stayed quiet and didn't answer her. Dingjing Shi Tai saw the two people guarding at the west were around fifty years old. Their faces were stiff like that of corpses and there was no sign of anger on their faces.

She sighed heavily and shouted, "Ok, watch out for my sword!"

She thrust her sword towards a person standing at the northwest. She knew that she was surrounded and that this thrust may not find its mark so she used this thrust as a false move. That person just stood still waiting for the sword as he knew it was only a false move. Dingjing Shi Tai was planning to take her sword back but when she saw him not paying attention to her, instead of taking her sword back in mid stroke, she put power into her right hand and pushed the sword forward. But the two people besides her target moved quickly and separately aimed their palms towards her left and right shoulders. Dingjing Shi Tai leaned to one side, jumped into the air, turned around and thrust her sword towards the tall person at the east side. The tall man slid back half a step and with a ringing sound, the sword hit a heavy iron tablet. He then lifted the iron tablet and struck at the top of her sword. Dingjing Shi Tai sneered, circled her sword and thrust it towards an old man on the left. The old man extended his left hand along the sword's path to try and grab it. In the moonlight, it looked like that he was wearing a black glove. Dingjing Shi Tai guessed that the glove's material might be impervious to the sword thrust. That seemed like the only reason why he was brave enough to use just his hands to grab a long sword.

She fought one enemy after another. Dingjing Shi Tai had now fought with five of the seven enemies. She felt that these five enemies were not that good. If she were only fighting with one or even two of them, she would not be afraid at all and would most probably win. But against these seven people, when she attacked any little crack in one person's defense, it was immediately covered by the next person. Then they would immediately counter-attack and turned the situation dangerously against her. After some more fighting, she thought in alarm, "Who are these capable people from the Devil Sect? I know most of their well-known people. Their martial arts and the weapons they used are also known by the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. So what's the background of these seven people, I really can't tell where they come from. I didn't anticipate that Devil Sect's power would grow so large in these past few years. They unexpectedly have many masters working for them."

She had fought around sixty to seventy moves but she was unable to keep up any further. She was now breathing heavily when from the corner of her eyes she saw more than ten shadows on the roof. Clearly, these people had been hiding there for a long time and only now appeared suddenly. She gloomily muttered, "It's finished, it's finished! I can't even handle these seven people. Now there are more enemies watching from the sides. Dingjing, it would be hard to escape from your death today. You would suffer a big insult if you fall into the enemies' hand. It would be better if you had killed yourself earlier. This stinky sack of leather is only my temporary residence. But when it's destroyed, I would still have some regrets. This time I had taken along many disciples and delivered them to their deaths. Old nun Dingjing is ashamed to face Heng-Shan School's ancestors."

She thrust three times "Shua, shua, shua" forcing the enemies to take two steps back. She suddenly reversed the long sword and pierced it towards her own heart.

As her sword was about to reach her chest, a "dang" sound was heard, her hand shook and the tip of her long sword was knocked away from her chest. A man was besides her with a sword in his hand. He exclaimed, "Dingjing Shi Tai, don't be short-sighted. Friends from Songshan School are here!" He was the one who knocked her long sword away. She then heard the sounds of swords clashing. More than ten men had one by one jumped out from their hiding spots to fight with those seven Devil Sect people.

Having escaped from death, Dingjing Shi Tai felt revitalised. She immediately went to join the battle again. But she saw that the Songshan School people were now fighting two against one and the seven Devil Sect people were at a disadvantage. Those seven people saw that sheer number was overwhelming them. They whistled and started to retreat towards the south. Dingjing Shi Tai chased them holding her sword. She suddenly heard the sound of wind coming towards her and recognized that many small projectiles had been released. Dingjing Shi Tai lifted her sword and concentrated on deflecting each of the projectiles aimed at her. In the middle of the night, there was only a glimmer of light from the moon and stars. Her long sword danced



around and a "ding, ding" sound was heard continuously as her sword deflected all the projectiles. As she was hindered by the projectiles, those seven Devil Sect people had managed to escape far. She heard the person behind her said, "Heng-Shan School's "Ten-thousand Blossoms Sword Art" is exquisite and peerless. Today our eyes have been widened."

Dingjing Shi Tai sheathed her long sword and slowly turned around. In a short moment, everything had become still and quiet. When she was fighting just then, she was a vigorous wulin martial artist. But now that the fight is over, she had turned into an amiable and benevolent old nun. She joined her two hands greeting the Songshan School people and said, "Older martial brother Zhong, thank you very much for breaking the encirclement."

She now recognised the middle-aged man as Songshan School leader Zuo's younger martial brother. His name was Zhong Zhen and his nickname was "Nine Bent Sword". This nickname was not because he really used a bent sword but it was because his sword art fluctuates irregularly and was unpredictable. Dingjing Shi Tai had met him before at a meeting of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance at Taishan Mountain monastery. From the remaining Songshan School people, she knew three or four of them.

Zhong Zhen cupped his hand returning the courtesy. He smiled and said, "Dingjing Shi Tai, you fought with seven people by yourself. These seven people are Devil Sect's "Seven Star Emissaries". Your sword art is really high. I admire you." Dingjing Shi Tai pondered, "So, these seven chaps are called 'Seven Star Emissaries'." She didn't want to appear unknowledgeable so she didn't ask anymore. She thought she could inquire about those people some other day. It was already good enough now for her to know their names.

One by one, the rest of the Songshan School people went up to greet her. Two of them were Zhong Zhen's younger martial brothers, while the rest were disciples a generation lower than them. Dingjing Shi Tai was still returning the greetings when she said, "I'm really ashamed. My Heng-Shan School has arrived in Fujian with several tens of disciples. But they've suddenly gone

missing in this town. Martial brother Zhong, how long have you arrived at Nianbapu town? Do you have any clues for old nun to investigate?"

She believed that Songshan School people had been hiding here for a long time but they wanted to wait for her to get exhausted first before they come out and help. It was obvious that they wanted to shame her and at the same time show their power. She wasn't pleased at all. But many of her disciples had gone missing and it was a matter of grave importance. So she had no choice but to ask them about it. She felt this was her own problem to handle so she didn't want to ask these people for help. She already felt it was wrong to ask Zhong Zhen for information.

Zhong Zhen said, "Devil Sect witches are very crafty. They knew that Shi Tai's martial art is very outstanding and that it would be very hard for them to win. So they secretly captured all the disciples first. Shi Tai doesn't have to worry. Although Devil Sect is daring, they wouldn't harm martial sisters. Let's go down and discuss carefully on how we're going to save them."

After he finished saying this, he extended his left hand inviting her to go down. She nodded her head and jumped down. Zhong Zhen followed her and also jumped down. He then went to the west while saying, "I'll lead the way." After walking for a hundred feet, he turned north. They arrived in front of Xian An Inn and he pushed the main door open.

"Shi Tai, we'll discuss the matter in here," said Zhong Zhen.

The other two martial brothers were "Divine Whip" Deng Bagong and "Bright Hair Lion" Gao Kexin. The three of them led Dingjing Shi Tai to a big room upstairs. After the lamps were lighted, they took their seats while the other disciples offered them tea and then retreated out of the room. Gao Kexin went to the door and closed it.

Zhong Zhen said, "We've long admired Shi Tai's sword art, Heng-Shan School's number one.... "

Dingjing Shi Tai shook her head and said, "Wrong, my sword art isn't as good as my martial sister. It's also inferior to martial sister Dingyi."

Zhong Zhen smiled and said, "Shi Tai, don't be too modest. We martial brothers have long admired heroine and been wanting to see Shi Tai's clever sword art. That's why we were late in helping. We don't have any bad intention. I sincerely apologise. Shi Tai please don't blame us."

Dingjing Shi Tai felt a bit calmer and saw the three of them stood up and cupped their fists. She also stood up to return the gesture and said, "Well said."

Zhong Zhen waited for her to sit down before saying, "When our schools formed the Five Mountain Sword alliance, we considered ourselves to be of the same branch and share all weal and woes together. It's just that in the last few years, we've had little time to meet together and we also haven't collaborated on any matters. This has caused the Devil Sect to grow stronger and become more arrogant."

Dingjing Shi Tai uttered a "Hmph" thinking, "What is he doing saying all these idle talk?"

Zhong Zhen said again, "Everyday, older brother Zuo says: Together, we are strong. Divided, we are weak. If the Five Mountain Sword Alliance can join together and become one, then the Devil Sect wouldn't antagonise us. Even the big school of Shaolin and Wudang who have been enjoying their big reputation for a long time wouldn't be able to compare to us. Brother Zuo wishes that we no longer had this disunity of the five mountain sword schools. He wants us to combine together and become the "Five Mountain School". That way, we would have many people cooperating together and we would really become the leader of Wulin. What does Shi Tai think of this?"

Dingjing Shi Tai scowled and said, "Poor nun at Heng-Shan School is only an idle person and don't pay much attention to matters. However, Martial brother Zhong has raised an important matter. You should come with me to meet my martial sisters to speak about this. Right now, the most important thing is to rescue my school's female disciples who have fallen into the Devil Sect's trap. We can discuss other matters in details after this."

Zhong Zhen smiled and said, "Shi Tai, don't worry. I've already asked Songshan School people to handle this. Heng-

Shan School's problem is also Songshan School's. We wouldn't let your school's disciples to suffer."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "In that case, many thanks. But I don't know how brother Zhong came to have this optimistic outlook about my problem? What assurances do you have to say these words?"

Zhong Zhen smilingly said, "Shi Tai yourself is here. You're Heng-Shan School's well-known master. How could we still be afraid of a few demons from the Devil Sect? Also, there are still we martial brothers and several other martial nephews. We'll definitely use all our power to fight them. If we still can't handle these second rate fighters from Devil Sect then, hey hey, that's too ridiculous for us to say."

Dingjing Shi Tai heard him talking about irrelevant things that she became anxious and angry. She stood up and said, "Brother Zhong is talking as if the situation looks good. Let's go now!"

"Where are you going Shi Tai?" asked Zhong Zhen.

"Going to save people," answered Dingjing Shi Tai.

"Where are you going to save people?" asked Zhong Zhen again.

Dingjing Shi Tai was dumbfounded and unable to answer the question. After a moment, she said, "My disciples haven't gone missing for a long time. So of course they're still somewhere nearby. We've procrastinated for a long time now, so it's going to be more difficult to find them."

Zhong Zhen said, "According to our intelligence, the Devil Sect people have a lair not far from Nianbapu town. It's very likely that your school's martial sisters are being held captive there. According to..."

Dingjing Shi Tai interrupted, "Where's this lair? We'll go save them."

Zhong Zhen slowly said, "Devil Sect would be well prepared to receive us. If we rashly go and make a mistake, then I can't say for sure that we'll be able to save them. We already know where they are. In my opinion, we should discuss this first before going to save them. This is a comparatively better plan."

Dingjing Shi Tai couldn't stand it anymore but she still sat back down.

She said, "I'll listen to martial brother Zhong's high opinion."

"I've come to Fujian under martial brother's order to discuss an important matter with Shi Tai. This matter concerns the destiny of the Wulin world. It also implicates the rise and fall of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. So this is not a small matter at all. We need to discuss this big matter first and the remaining matters like saving people will have to wait. This is how we should go about it," said Zhong Zhen.

"But I don't know what big matter brother Zhong is talking about?" asked Dingjing Shi Tai.

Zhong Zhen said, "The big matter is the one that I've just raised before. The matter of combining the Five Mountains Sword Alliance into one."

Dingjing Shi Tai suddenly stood up and her complexion turned green. She stuttered, "You.... you.... you...."

Zhong Zhen just smiled slightly and said, "Shi Tai, please don't misunderstand. I'm not taking advantage of someone in a precarious position. I'm just compelling Shi Tai to agree to this matter."

Dingjing Shi Tai indignantly said, "You said it yourself. If this is not taking advantage of someone in a precarious position, then what is this?"

Zhong Zhen answered, "You're from Heng-Shan School. I'm from Songshan School. When your school is facing a problem, of course my school is also concerned. After all, this is a matter of life and death. Of course, I'm willing to help Shi Tai with all my power. But I don't know if my martial brothers and martial nephews would be willing to do so. But if the two schools have merged into one, then this problem would become our school's problem. Then they would have no more excuses."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "According to what you said, if my Heng-Shan School doesn't merge with your school, then you would just sit on your hand and be a spectator regarding the matter of Heng-Shan School's missing disciples?"

Zhong Zhen said, "It can't be said like that. I've been ordered by martial brother to catch up with Shi Tai to discuss this matter.

So other matters must wait before martial brother's order is completed. That's why I don't dare to handle this matter carelessly. Shi Tai, please don't blame us."

Dingjing Shi Tai's face had gone completely pale. She coldly said, "Poor nun can't take the responsibility for making the decision regarding the merging of our two schools. Even if I agree to this but my school's martial sisters don't agree, then everything would've been in vain."

Zhong Zhen leaned forward and whispered, "If Shi Tai agree then Dingxian Shi Tai can't disagree. Originally, the leader of each school and each faction has always been held by the first disciple. Looking at Shi Tai's attitude, martial art, and also your position in the school, Shi Tai deserves to be the leader of Heng-Shan School...."

Suddenly, Dingjing Shi Tai slapped the table and broke it. She fiercely retorted, "You want to sow dissension? I was the one who requested my deceased master that martial sister be the leader of our school. It was also me who persuaded martial sister Dingxian to take up the position. If Dingjing wanted to be the leader of the school then I would've done it during that time instead of using other people to incite it now."

Zhong Zhen sighed and said, "What brother Zuo said wasn't wrong."

"What did he say?" said Dingjing Shi Tai.

Zhong Zhen said, "Before we went south, brother Zuo said: 'The conduct of Heng-Shan School's Dingjing Shi Tai's is too good. Her martial art is also extremely high and she's admired by everyone. But it's a pity that she always fails to see the larger issue.' I asked him why he said these words and he answered: 'I have known Dingjing Shi Tai's manner for some time; she's naturally aloof from worldly affairs and doesn't cherish unwarranted reputation. On common matters, she's happy not to pay attention to them. If you ask her about this matter of combining the five schools, then you'll certainly meet with this problem.' This matter actually concerns a lot of things. We know that we wouldn't be able to handle it by ourselves but we're still going to try. If Dingjing Shi Tai is only concerned about yourself and ignores the thousands of lives from the orthodox schools who

are in danger, then the Wulin realm will fall under a disaster and there's nothing we can do."

Dingjing Shi Tai stood up and coldly said, "You cleverly took this opportunity to say many honeyed words. But they're all completely useless to me. Songshan School has taken this path. You're not only taking advantage of someone in a precarious situation but also hitting a person when he is down."

Zhong Zhen said, "Shi Tai, you're wrong. If Shi Tai agrees to this matter and let the people in Wulin to know about this, it will facilitate our Songshan, Heng-Shan, Taishan, Huashan, and Hengshan five mountains to merge together. Then Songshan School will definitely support Shi Tai to become our "Five Mountains School" leader. So you can see clearly that our brother Zuo is sincere and doesn't have any personal ambition..."

Dingjing Shi Tai shook her hand continuously and shouted, "Say no more! My ear is already drowning in filth."

She put her hand together and pushed them out. A noisy "peng" sound was heard as two boards were blown away by her qi. She moved quickly and in no time was already outside Xian An Inn.

When she was out of the door, the calm wind caressed and cooled her red-hot face. She considered, "That surname Zhong said that Devil Sect has a lair near Nianbapu town. The missing school disciples must be there. I don't know how much of what he said is true and how much is false." Then she walked away undecidedly without a plan. Walking alone, she looked at her own long shadow reflected on the slab stone as the moon lowered in the sky.

After walking for some distance, she stopped and thought, "I only have my own power to rely on. Just by myself, I won't be able to save my disciples. The old grand heroes had always been able to adjust themselves to any situation. Why didn't I just temporarily agree to that guy Zhong? After we've saved my disciples, I could immediately cut my own throat to thank them and teach him that with my death he will have no proof of the agreement. He would only be able to announce that I've eaten my own words and dirty my name. This I'm willing to bear by myself."

She sighed thinking about this. Then she turned around and slowly walked back to Xian Xia Inn. Suddenly she heard someone shouting from the end of the long street. "Your granny, General wants to drink wine and get some sleep. Your granny, shop servants, why don't you quickly open the door?" It was just yesterday at Xianxia mountain range that she met with General Wu Tiande. When Dingjing Shi Tai heard his voice, it was like a drowning person catching a big lumber.

Yesterday, Linghu Chong had helped Heng-Shan School escaped from danger at the top of Xianxia mountain range. Feeling proud of himself, he hurried along the road and arrived at Nianbapu town. He then quickly found a restaurant and went in. He shouted, "Bring out the wine!" When the servants saw that it was a General who had entered the shop, they didn't dare to be slow and lazy. They quickly poured the wine, cooked the rice, killed the chicken and sliced the beef. They were being very respectful towards him and were standing at attention and serving him attentively. Linghu Chong became slightly drunk after many bowls of wine. In his heart, he was thinking, "Devil Sect has suffered a great setback this time. But they probably wouldn't be resigned to it. Nineteen people are still enough to cause trouble for Heng-Shan School. Dingjing Shi Tai is foolhardy and isn't Devil Sect's match. So I must look after them in secret."

After he had paid for his meal and wine, he went to Xian An Inn to sleep. He woke up at noon to wash his face when he suddenly heard people shouting on the street. "Huang Fengzai's people from Chaos Stone Mound are coming to Nianbapu to plunder the town. They will kill every person they meet. They will take all the money they see. Everyone quickly run away to save your life!" The shouting could be heard from everywhere.

The servant at the inn screamed, "General, General, there's a bad thing coming!"

Linghu Chong inquired, "Your granny, what bad thing is coming?"

"General, Huang Fengzai's men from Chaos Stone Mound are coming. They're coming to plunder the town tonight. Everyone is escaping already," replied the servant.



Linghu Chong opened his room's door and scolded, "Your granny, today is a sunny day. The sky is clear. How can there be robbers? General is right here. Do they still dare to plunder?"

That servant had a bitter expression on his face. But he still answered, "Those robbers, they're fierce... they're very fierce... they... they also don't know General that you.... you are here."

Linghu Chong said, "You go tell them then."

The servant answered, "I... I'm only a nobody, I don't dare to go and tell them. They'll chop my head off."

Linghu Chong said, "What kind of place is Huang Fengzai's Chaos Stone Mound?"

The servant answered, "I don't know what kind of place Chaos Stone Mound is. I've never heard of it before. I only know Huang Fengzai's people are very fierce. Two days ago, they plundered a town 30 li north of Nianbapu called Rongshutou. They killed sixty to seventy people and burned more than one hundred houses there. General, you... although your martial art is high, your two hands would find it difficult to fight four hands. Not counting their big leader, I heard that they have more than three hundred people."

Linghu Chong scolded, "Your granny, so what if they have three hundred people? When General fights a battle with a thousand people and ten thousand horses, then when seven people entered the battle seven people will come out alive, eight people enter then eight people come out alive."

The servant said, "Yes, yes" and turned around to quickly go out.

The situation outside was already in chaos. People were calling out to each other in Zhejiang's speech but in Fujian's dialect. Linghu Chong couldn't understand completely what was being said. He could only guess they were saying something like: "A Mao's mom, have you taken the quilt yet?" or "Da Bao, Xiao Bao, hurry up. The robbers are coming!" When he walked outside, he saw tens of people carrying bundles behind their backs and basket on their hands. They were going south to escape.

Linghu Chong thought, "This is Zhejiang's boundary. Hangzhou and Fuzhou's Generals aren't taking care of this area

causing the robbers to create chaos here and hurt the common people. My Quanzhou's big General Wu Tiande is here already so I can't just sit back and do nothing. Killing those robbers' leader would be an accomplishment. This is called feeding him good fortune and being loyal. Your granny, why not? Haha!" After his train of thoughts arrived at this conclusion, he couldn't help but laughed continuously. He called out, "Servants, bring out the wine! General wants to drink wine before killing some thieves."

But at that moment, everyone inside from the guests to shop owner, shop owner's wife, second aunt, third aunt, as well as the shop servants, and the cooks were all going out of the inn one by one. They only slowed down a step when they heard his voice but then continued their escape, afraid of the coming robbers. Linghu Chong kept calling them but no one paid any attention to him. Linghu Chong couldn't stand it anymore so he went to the kitchen himself to fetch the wine. He then sat in the main hall and poured himself some wine. Next, he heard the sounds of chickens, dogs, horses and pigs. He guessed that the townspeople were taking these animals to escape with them. After a moment, it gradually became quieter. He drank three more bowls of wine and by then all the frightened and anxious sounds were gone. The town had become completely quiet. He thought, "Bad luck for Huang Fengzai's people. I don't know where the townspeople got the news from but when the robbers got here, they wouldn't have anything to plunder."

He was the only remaining person now in this big town. He found the silence really strange and was feeling quite lonely. Suddenly, he heard the sound of horses galloping in the distance. There were four horses coming from the south in a rush. Linghu Chong thought, "The robbers have arrived. But how come there's only a few people?" The four horses galloped down the street making a "zheng, zheng" sound when the horseshoes hit the stone slabs on the road.

A person shouted, "Nianbapu people, listen to Chaos Stone Mound Huang Fengzai's order. All males, females, old and young, get out of town! We won't kill you if you're outside. Everyone who stays inside will be chopped to death." They were shouting continuously while their horses galloped down the street. Linghu

Chong went to the main door and opened it a crack to have a look. But the horses had gone past and he was only able to see the back of the people riding the horses. He thought, "This is not right! Looking at those people riding, it's clear they know some martial art. How can the bandits have this kind of people?" He pushed the door open and walked out. After walking for more than one hundred feet, he still couldn't see anyone around. Then he saw a scholar tree on the side of the road, its branches and leaves luxuriant. He quickly went up the tree and sat on the highest branch. There was no sound at all around him. He waited up there for a long time knowing that something was not right. Huang Fengzai's people had come a long time ago but his big group still had not come yet. Could it be that some of the robbers came here to notify the townspeople to escape?

After he had been waiting for an hour, he faintly heard some voices. It was the chirping of females' voices. With rapt attention he heard a few sentences. From the sentences he heard, he knew that it was the Heng-Shan School's disciples. He thought, "How come they arrived here at this time? Oh, they must've spent the day resting on the mountain." He heard them knocking on the Xian An Inn's door and then went to another inn to knock on that inn's door. There was quite a bit of distance between Nan An Inn and the scholar tree, so when Heng-Shan School people entered the inn, he couldn't hear or see what they were doing in there.

He secretly felt, "In all likelihood, this is the Devil Sect's trap to ambush Heng-Shan School people." At the moment, he was still concealed on top of the tree calmly waiting for something to happen. After waiting for a long time, he saw Yiqing and six disciples went out of the inn to light up the lamps. The whole street was now lit up by the lights from the houses' windows. After another moment, he suddenly heard the voice of a female shouting, "Help!" Linghu Chong was startled: "Aiyo, this is not good. Heng-Shan School disciples have met the Devil Sect's treachery." He immediately jumped down from the tree and went to the house where the scream came from. He looked inside the house from a crack in the window. But there was no light in there and only the pale light from the moon was coming in through the window. He saw seven or eight men standing against the wall

and one female standing in the middle of the room. She shouted, "Help, help, someone's murdered!" Linghu Chong looked at the side of her face and noticed that her expression was fierce. It was obvious that they were waiting to ambush people.

As expected, as she just finished calling out, a female disciple outside the house shouted, "Who has committed murder here?" The house's door was pushed open and seven females jumped inside; one of them was Yiqing. These seven disciples were each holding a long sword in hand thinking they were going to save someone. Suddenly that female, who shouted for help before, threw out her right hand and hurled open a roughly four square feet of green cloth. Yiqing and the other six disciples started to tremble. It looks like they were dizzy when they started to turn around in circles and dropped down.

Linghu Chong was alarmed and he felt shocked through his heart, "That woman's green cloth must have some kind of confusion poison in it. If I go in to save them then I'll also fall in their trap. I can only wait and watch what happens for now." Those men on the wall quickly crowded around, took out some rope, and started binding Yiqing's and the other disciples' hands and feet. Not long after, another female shouted sharply from outside, "What kind of person is here?" When Linghu Chong passed through the Xianxia mountain range, he had met with this bad tempered nun and had also chatted with her. He knew that Yihe was the one out there. He thought, "You are really hot-tempered. This time, you'll become rice dumpling again<sup>14</sup>." He heard Yihe shouted again, "Sister Yiqing, are you here?" and a "peng" sound was heard as she kicked the door open.

Yihe and another disciple went forward shoulder to shoulder. As they stepped inside the house, they waved their swords around separately on their left and right sides, protecting themselves from an enemy's attack. At the same time, the other five disciples were walking backwards into the house and were also waving their swords around. When the two of the disciples got inside the house, the woman and her cohorts held their breath and stopped moving completely. Once all seven of the disciples were in the house, that woman hurled open her green cloth again and the disciples were again confused before

collapsing to the ground. They were followed by Yu Sao's group which also fell into the same trap. There were now twenty-one of Heng-Shan School disciples that have lost consciousness and tied up at the corner of the house. After a while, an old man in their group made some hand signals and they quietly retreated from the house's back door.

Linghu Chong jumped to the roof and crouched down. He was following them for a short distance when he suddenly heard sounds of flapping clothes from the house in front. The sound was coming from the roof ridge of the house. He saw ten men hand signaling to each other. They were all concealed from the street while seated on the side of the roof ridge. His current hiding place was only tens of feet away from them. Linghu Chong slid down the wall quietly when he saw Dingjing Shi Tai coming to this area leading three disciples.

Linghu Chong thought, "This isn't good. This is using "luring the tiger leaving the mountain" tactic. Those nuns left at the Nan An Inn will be in trouble." In the distance, he saw shadows moving hurriedly towards the Nan An Inn. What he thought before had become a reality. Suddenly he heard someone whispering, "Delay that old nun from coming over, the seven of you entertain her here." This voice came from above his head so Linghu Chong couldn't move at all or he would be discovered. So he flattened his back on the wall and didn't move at all. He heard Dingjing Shi Tai kicked the door open and called out, "Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao, do you hear me?" Her voice travelled far and then he saw her going around the house and jumping onto the roof. But she didn't look carefully inside the house. Linghu Chong thought, "What is she doing? Why isn't she going inside the house to have a look? Once she goes in then she'll see the twenty one female disciples tied up on the ground." He realised immediately, "It's actually good that she's not going in. Those Devil Sect people are on the roof waiting for her to enter the house. Then they'll immediately surround her from four directions. That's like capturing a turtle in an urn."

He saw Dingjing Shi Tai going here and there realising that she didn't know what to do. Suddenly, she went quickly towards Nan An Inn and those three disciples couldn't keep up with her.

As that happened, a lot of people turned up from the side of the street and hurled that green cloth open. Those three disciples immediately collapsed and they were dragged inside a house. With the pale light from the moon, he could blurrily see that Yilin was among those three people. Linghu Chong quickly thought, "Should I quickly go and save little martial sister Yilin?" And another thought quickly followed, "I'm only by myself and the fight will be big. The Devil Sect has captured so many of Heng-Shan School's people. I must be careful not to harm them while I'm taking care of the Devil Sect people. I can't fight in front of them so I must still do this in secret."

He saw Dingjing Shi Tai came out of Nan An Inn and started to scold the Devil Sect in the middle of the street. Then she went up to the roof and started scolding Dongfang Bubai. As expected, Devil Sect people couldn't bear this anymore and seven people went up to fight her. When Linghu Chong saw this, he pondered, "Dingjing Shi Tai's sword art is refined and deep. Even one against seven, she would be able to hold them out for some time. I'll go save martial sister Yilin first."

His body moved like lightning entering the house. He saw a person in the main hall holding a sabre and the three disciples tied up on the ground beside him. Linghu Chong jumped forward and took out his Yaodao saber. Then using his sheathed sabre, he stabbed it towards that person's throat. That person didn't even react before he died. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded, "How come my sword is so fast? I just extended my hand and it already reached his throat?" He himself didn't know that ever since he practised the Art of Essence Absorbing, the internal energies of the Peach Valley six fairies, Monk No-Commandment, and Mr. Black-White had become his own internal energy to use. His initial idea was that once he stabbed with his sabre then the enemy would raise his own sabre to block and he would then use his sheathed sabre to hit his enemy's legs to drop him on the ground. Then he would be able to save the three martial sisters. Unexpectedly, his enemy didn't even have time to raise his sabre before he got hit and killed.

Linghu Chong felt apologetic as he dragged the dead man away. Then he looked down, he saw that Yilin was among the

three female disciples lying on the ground. He extended his hand to check her breathing and found her breathing evenly. Except for being unconscious, she was otherwise unharmed. He quickly went to the kitchen to fetch a ladle of cold water and splashed it on her face. In a little while, Yilin woke up and groaned slightly. At the beginning, she didn't know that she was on the ground. She opened her eyes and suddenly realised what had happened. She quickly jumped up and wanted to draw her sword. But both of her hands and feet were tied up, and she fell back down.

Linghu Chong said, "Little Shi Tai, don't be afraid. That bad person has been killed by General." He then used his sabre to cut away the ropes binding her hands and feet. In the darkness, Yilin heard his voice and it was that person "Big brother Linghu" that she had been thinking of day and night. She was alarmed and happy at the same time. She called out, "You... you are Linghu Big... " This word "brother" wasn't said when she thought that it wasn't right. Her whole face turned red and she quietly whispered, "Who... who are you?"

Linghu Chong heard her recognizing him and then correcting herself. He whispered, "General is here. Those small-time thieves wouldn't dare to bully you anymore."

"Ah, so it's General Wu. How about my... my martial uncle?" asked Yilin.

"She's outside fighting with the enemies. Let's go out and take a look," said Linghu Chong.

"Sister Zheng, Sister Qin..." said Yilin.

She took out from her bosom a fire stick and lighted it up. She saw her two disciple sisters lying on the ground.

She said, "En, they're all here." She wanted to cut the ropes on their hands and feet.

But Linghu Chong said, "Don't bother. Helping your martial uncle is more important at the moment."

Yilin said, "That's true."

Linghu Chong turned around and went outside with Yilin following behind. They had just walked several steps when they saw those seven enemies fleeing. Then they heard the projectiles being deflected and someone praising how high Dingjing Shi Tai's sword art is. Dingjing Shi Tai recognised that the person is

from the Songshan School. Not long after that, he saw Dingjing Shi Tai following those men to go into Xian An Inn. Linghu Chong signaled to Yilin to follow him to the inn and hid outside the window to eavesdrop. They heard Dingjing Shi Tai chatting with Zhong Zhen inside the room. That person surnamed Zhong wanted Dingjing Shi Tai to agree to the merging of the Heng-Shan School first before they would help save her disciples. Linghu Chong heard him harbouring evil intentions and taking advantage of someone who was already down. He secretly felt angry. He also heard Dingjing Shi Tai getting more and more angry as Zhong Zhen said more words until she finally jumped out of the inn.

Linghu Chong waited for Dingjing Shi Tai to go a bit further before he went down and knocked on Xian An Inn's door. He shouted, "Your granny, General wants to drink wine and sleep. Your granny shop servants, why don't you quickly open the door?" It was just at that time that Dingjing Shi Tai had run out of ideas when she heard this general's shout. She felt really happy and quickly went over. Yilin went up to welcome her and called out, "Martial uncle!" Dingjing Shi Tai felt even happier. She hastily asked, "Where did you go before?"

Yilin answered, "I was captured by Devil Sect demons. General rescued me..."

At this time, Linghu Chong had pushed the door open and walked in. Inside the main hall was two candles lighted up and Zhong Zhen was sitting in the middle of the hall. Zhong Zhen gloomily said, "Who's making all those noises? Come out quickly!"

Linghu Chong scolded him, "Your granny! This is general working for the government court; you still have the guts to speak out? Shopkeeper, Boss' wife, servants, quickly come out."

Songshan School people heard him scolding and then asking for the shopkeeper and the boss' wife. It was obvious to them that he looked fierce on the outside but soft on the inside and that he was feeling afraid in his heart. They all found it funny. Zhong Zhen was still thinking about the big matter in his heart when this government dog came in the middle of the night. He quietly said, "Get rid of this chap but don't kill him." Bright Hair



Lion Gao Kexin nodded his head. He then laughed aloud and went towards Linghu Chong. He said, "So it's granddad from the government. Pardon me for not paying respect."

"It's already good that you know. You people are only ordinary folks so you don't know any rules..." said Linghu Chong.

Gao Kexin laughed, "Haha! Yes! Yes!" and in a flash, his body was in front of Linghu Chong. He extended his forefinger and stabbed it towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong saw where he was aiming at and he quickly concentrated his internal energy at his waist. Gao Kexin's stab found Linghu Chong's laughing acupoint. When an opponent was hit at this point, he would laugh loudly once and would immediately lose consciousness. To his surprise, Linghu Chong just giggled once and said, "You're not following any rules. What kind of joke are you playing with General moving your hands and feet about?" Gao Kexin was greatly surprised. But he already executed his second stab. This time he was using all of his power in his stab. Linghu Chong laughed loudly and jumped up. He laughingly scolded him, "Your granny, what are you doing rubbing general's waist? You want to steal some silvers? Hmm, you look solemn, handsome and intelligent. But actually you're an unlearned man."

Gao Kexin's left hand shot out to grab Linghu Chong's right wrist and he was going to use his right hand to fling him down to the ground. Unexpectedly, as his hand touched Linghu Chong's wrist, his internal energy started to rush out of his body and he couldn't stop it. He couldn't help but be completely frightened. He wanted to shout but even when his mouth was opened wide, no sound was coming out.

Linghu Chong was aware that his opponent's internal energy was being absorbed into his body. It was just like that day when he grabbed Mr. Black-White's wrist. He was alarmed, "I can't use this demonical method." He quickly flinged Gao Kexin away, breaking the contact.

Gao Kexin felt as if he had received a King's pardon as he was stupidly thrown down. He quickly stood up but felt weak all over as if he had just recovered from a big illness. He shouted, "Art of Essence Absorbing. Art... Art of Essence Absorbing!" His

shout came out as more of a hiss but it was full of fear. Zhong Zhen, Deng Bagong and the rest of the Songshan School disciples jumped up at the same time and asked, "What?" Gao Kexin stammered, "This.. this person is using art... art of Essence Absorbing."

All of a sudden the room was filled with lights flickering off swords as everyone drew their long swords out from their scabbards while Divine Whip Deng Bagong held a whip in his hand. Zhong Zhen's sword art was the fastest. Under the trembling cold light of the room, the reflective light of his sword had already pierced Linghu Chong's throat. When that Gao Kexin shouted, Linghu Chong already anticipated that Songshan School people would immediately gang up on him and they were now thrusting their swords towards him. But as they were pulling their swords out, Linghu Chong also pulled his Yaodao sabre along with its sheath out from his waist and used it like a long sword. His hand shook lightly and the back of everyone's hand was hit and "qiang lang" sounds were heard. The "qiang lang" noise had not stopped yet when all the swords were dropped on the ground. Zhong Zhen's martial art was the highest, even though the back of his hand had been hit by Linghu Chong's scabbard, he still managed to hold on to it. He was frightened and jumped back. Deng Bagong was distressed and let go of the whip's handle, which made the whip lashed up and wrapped around his neck restricting him from drawing any breath.

Zhong Zhen was leaning his back against the wall and his face had lost all colour. "A well known in Jiang Hu. Devil Sect's Chief Ren resurfaces. You... you... you are Chief Ren... are you Ren Woxing?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Your granny, what Ren Woxing, Ren Nixing, General won't change his surname and won't change his name either<sup>15</sup>. My surname is Wu, my name is Tiande. From which mound did you come from? Are you that whatever Zai's small time thieves?"

Zhong Zhen clasped both his hands, "Sir, you have re-entered Jiang Hu. Zhong knows that I'm not your match so I'm going." He jumped through the window to get out. Gao Kexin followed him and jumped out the window too. Then one by one,

they all jumped out through the window. Although the floor was full of long swords, none of them dared to take any of them. Linghu Chong's left hand was now holding the scabbard while his right hand was holding the sabre's handle. He then used his strength to pull on the handle a few times but that sabre never came out from its sheath. He said, "The rust on this treasured sabre is really bad. I should look for a grindstone and sharpen it."

Dingjing Shi Tai clasped her hands and asked, "General Wu, how do we save my disciples?" Linghu Chong expected that as soon as Zhong Zhen and his people went away, no one would be able to match Dingjing Shi Tai's divine sword. He replied, "General wants to drink a few bowls of wine here. Old Shi Tai, do you want to drink wine too?" When Yilin heard him talking about drinking wine again, she thought, "If this general meets with big brother Linghu, they would certainly become drinking buddies." As she took a peep at him, she saw that the general was staring at her. Her face turned slightly red and she lowered her head. Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Forgive me. Poor nun doesn't drink wine. General, I won't accompany you!" She clasped her hands again and then turned around to leave. Yilin followed her out but when she reached the door, she couldn't help but to take another look at him. She saw him looking for wine and calling out in a loud voice, "Your granny, all the people in the inn have all disappeared. How come those servants are still not coming out." She thought, "His voice sounds similar to big brother Linghu's but whenever this general speaks, he's very vulgar. Every sentence he has to mention his whatever. Big brother Linghu isn't like that at all. His martial art is also much higher compared to big brother Linghu. I... I must be imagining things... Ai, must be... "

Linghu Chong had finally found some wine and he immediately gulped it down. He thought, "When these nuns, grannies and ladies come back, they'll talk non-stop and I'll have to endure it for sure. It's better if I just run away before then. Saving these people would take around an hour and my tummy would be very hungry by that time. It's better if I find something to eat first."

After he finished a pot of wine, he went to the kitchen looking for something to eat. Suddenly, he heard from somewhere far away, Yilin sharply shouting, "Martial uncle, martial uncle, where are you?" She sounded frightened.

Linghu Chong hurriedly rushed out of the inn and followed the voice. When he got there, he saw Yilin and two young ladies standing on the street. They were calling out, "Martial uncle, master!"

Linghu Chong asked, "What happened?"

Yilin answered, "I went to wake martial sister Zheng and martial sister Qin. Martial uncle was concerned about the other martial sisters so she went ahead to rescue them. But when we got out, maybe... we don't know where she has gone to." Linghu Chong saw that Zheng E was around twenty one two years old while Qin Juan was even younger, looking like fifteen sixteen years old. He thought, "I haven't seen these young ladies before. What's Heng-Shan School doing sending them out to come here?"

He smiled, "I know where they are. Come with me!"

He walked quickly to the northeast towards the house where the disciples were captured earlier. When he arrived at the house with the broken door, he was afraid that the woman with the confusing drugs was still inside ready to ambush them. He said, "Use your handkerchiefs to cover your mouth and nose. There's a smelly granny inside who releases poison." He pinched his nose using his left hand and shut his lips tightly. Then he rushed into the house. When he reached the main hall, he was dumbfounded.

Previously, the main hall was full of Heng-Shan School female disciples. But now, there wasn't a single trace of them. He was surprised. There was a candle lighting up the hall but the hall was totally empty. Where did they go? He searched every room in the house but found nothing unusual. He called out, "There's something strange here!"

Yilin, Zheng E, and Qin Juan eyes were wide open looking at him, their faces full of doubt. Linghu Chong said, "Your granny, your martial sisters were right here. An old granny had poisoned

them all. Then they were tied up right here. How come they're all gone now?"

Zheng E asked, "General Wu, when you saw our martial sisters being poisoned, was it really here?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Last night, when I was sleeping, I had a dream. I saw with my eyes many old nuns, about seven or eight of them lying right here. How can it be wrong?"

Zheng E said, "You... you..."

She wanted to say that it was his dream so how can it be accurate? But she knew that he liked to speak nonsense. He said that it was a dream but he probably saw it with his own eyes so she quickly corrected herself, "Where do you think they've all gone to?"

Linghu Chong hummed deeply, "I'm not sure where we can find big fishes and big meat. I think they've all gone to have a feast. Or maybe the place where there's opera; they're watching opera."

He moved his hands around and continued, "You three are small girls. So it's better if you stay close behind me. If you want to eat meat or watch opera, we'll do it later."

Although Qin Juan was still young, she knew the situation was really dangerous. Her other martial sisters had all fallen into enemy's hands. While this general blindly said some nice words, she knew they were all not true. Tens of Heng-Shan School disciples had gone out but now only the three of them remained. Except for listening to this general's order, she had no other option. She followed the general outside along with Yilin and Zheng E. Linghu Chong was talking to himself, "Could it be that I saw the wrong people in my dream last night? Tonight, I won't be able to have such a good dream again." But in his heart, he was thinking, "The other female disciples must've been moved away. But how come Dingjing Shi Tai had also disappeared? I'm afraid she might have met the enemy by herself and chased them. Hmm... It wouldn't be appropriate to leave Yilin and these two in Nianbapu town, I'd better take them along." He said, "We don't have anything to do right now. Why don't we go and look for your martial uncle and see where she's playing? What do you think?"

Zheng E answered, "That's extremely good! General's martial art is high and your experience is vast. If General doesn't lead the three of us in looking for martial uncle then I'm afraid it would be very difficult for us to find them."

Linghu Chong laughed, "'Martial art is high and experience is vast', you're not wrong in saying these eight words. In the future, when General hangs up his command and got a promotion and got rich, then I'll send the three of you one hundred, two hundred shining silver taels to buy clothes to wear."

As he was talking non-stop, they've reached the edge of Nianbapu town. He then jumped onto a roof and looked at the four directions. At this time, the morning sun was already above the horizon, the white fog filled the air, and above the treetops the sky was cloudy. He gazed far but there was no one on the two main roads. Suddenly, he saw an object on the main road to the south. He couldn't see clearly what it was because of the distance. But when the whole road was empty and an item was in the middle of the street like this, then it would definitely catch the attention of your eyes. He jumped down from the roof and quickly went to where that object was. Once he got there, he picked it up. It was a female shoe. Apparently it was identical to the one Yilin was wearing. He waited for Yilin and the other two girls to arrive. He gave the shoe to Yilin and asked, "Is this your shoe? How come it's here?" Yilin received the shoe and realised it was the same type of shoe that she was wearing. She couldn't help but check her feet and saw that she was still wearing her shoes.

Zheng E said, "This... this is the shoe that our martial sisters wear. How did it end up here?"

Qin Juan said, "It must be one of the martial sisters who were captured by the enemy. She must've struggled here and dropped her shoe."

Zheng E replied, "Or she deliberately left the shoe behind to let us know."

Linghu Chong said, "Correct. Your martial art is high and your experience is vast. Should we go chase to the south or to the north?"

Zheng E answered, "Of course to the south."

Linghu Chong quickly started running to the south. At the beginning, the distance between him and the three girls wasn't that far. But as he went on, the distance became really far. Linghu Chong looked carefully along the road and he frequently looked back to watch the three ladies. He was afraid that he might get too far and wouldn't be able to help them if needed. So he waited for them to catch up to him before he ran again. They had gone for more than ten li in this manner when he saw that the road in front was rugged. There were a lot of trees on both sides providing a lot of places for enemies to hide in. If Yilin was captured while they were on these parts of the road, he wouldn't be able to save her. After a long time, he saw Qin Juan running towards him. Both of her cheeks were really red. He knew that she was still young and couldn't run for long distances. He decided to let them walk slowly for the moment. He said loudly, "Your granny, if we keep running that fast then General's leather boots will be worn through to the bottom. Can't let this happen. Why don't we just go slowly?" After walking for around seven to eight li, Qin Juan suddenly shouted, "Yi!" She crouched besides a shrub on the side and picked up a cap. It was the cap that Heng-Shan School's people wear.

Zheng E said, "General, it's one of our martial sisters' cap. They must've gone through this road."

The three girls quickly continued walking. They were going faster as they went. Linghu Chong was now behind them.

At noon, the four of them found a restaurant on the road. The shop owner saw a general with a nun and two young girls with him. He was really surprised and repeatedly hit the sides of his head. Linghu Chong slapped the table and scolded, "Your granny, what are you looking at? You've never seen monks and nuns before?"

That man said, "Yes, yes. I don't dare."

Zheng E asked, "Uncle, have you seen a few nuns passing by here?"

The man said, "I haven't seen a few nuns but I've seen one. One old Shi Tai passed by here. She was much older compared to this young Shi Tai here..."

Linghu Chong shouted, "You talk too much! One old Shi Tai, then how could her age be younger than this little Shi Tai?"

That man said, "Yes, yes."

Zheng E impatiently asked, "What happened to that old Shi Tai?"

The man answered, "That old Shi Tai hastily asked me whether I've seen a few nuns passing by this road. I said no and she just went. Ai, she's already old but she was still running really fast. She was also holding a sword in her hand. She looked like she was going to play a part in an opera."

Qin Juan clapped her hands and said, "That must be Master. Let's go quickly and chase her."

Linghu Chong said, "Don't rush. We'll eat first."

The four people hastily eat their meals. Just before they left, Qin Juan bought four steamed rolls. She said she was giving it to Master to eat. Linghu Chong's heart turned sour, "She's very filial towards her master. But for me, I can't even be filial to my master."

They chased until the sky became dark. But they had not seen a trace of either Dingjing Shi Tai or the Heng-Shan School's disciples. They kept an eye on the field with thick long grass while the street was getting narrower as they went. As they went further, the long grass was up to their waist and they weren't able to see the road anymore.

Suddenly, they heard some sounds of fighting coming from the northwest. Linghu Chong called out, "There's some fighting going on there. Let's take a look."

Qin Juan said, "Ai yo, maybe it's my Master?"

Linghu Chong went to the direction of the noise. After going for several hundred feet, the surrounding area was suddenly bright. They saw tens of tall fire sticks around the area and the sounds of fighting got noisier.

He quickened his steps as he got near to the area. Then he saw tens of people holding the fire sticks in a circle. Inside that circle was a person with her big sleeve flitting about and her long sword slashing around. It was Dingjing Shi Tai. Outside the circle were tens of people lying down on ground. With one look at their clothes, he knew that it was Heng-Shan School's female



disciples. Linghu Chong saw that those people holding the fire sticks were wearing masks on their faces. He walked nearer to the circle step by step. At the moment, every person there had his attention on the fight and no one saw him coming nearer. Linghu Chong laughed loudly and shouted, "Seven against one, that's shameful."

All those people with their faces covered were surprised to suddenly see him appear out of nowhere. They all turned their heads around to look at him. Only the seven people surrounding Dingjing Shi Tai didn't hear him and they kept on fighting. All of them were attacking her upper body. Linghu Chong saw on Dingjing Shi Tai's gown some splotches of fresh blood. He also saw blood splashed on her face. She was using her left hand to hold her sword. Obviously, her right hand had been injured.

At this time, someone shouted, "Who are you?" As a man jumped in front of Linghu Chong with both of his hands shaped in a knife form.

Linghu Chong shouted, "General has been going everywhere non stop but everyday I have to meet you small time thieves. Let's exchange names, General's sabre here doesn't chop nameless people."

A man laughed, "So it's this muddled person." as he slashed his sword to chop Linghu Chong's leg off.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Ai yo, you're really using your sabre?" His body swayed as he charged into their group with his sheathed sabre up. Seven continuous "Pa, pa, pa" was heard as seven people wrists were hit. Seven weapons fell on the ground one after another. A "ci" sound was heard as Dingjing Shi Tai's sword pierced into an enemy's chest. That person was startled as he couldn't avoid Dingjing Shi Tai's lightning fast sword. Dingjing Shi Tai swayed a few times and as her legs couldn't support her anymore, she sat on the ground.

Qin Juan screamed, "Master, master." as she went towards her master to support her.

One of the masked men lifted his sabre and put it on a Heng-Shan School's disciple's neck. He shouted, "Retreat three steps, if you don't do as I say, I'll kill this woman first."

Linghu Chong laughed, "Very good, very good. If you want us to retreat, then we'll retreat. What's so strange about that? Don't say three steps, even thirty steps is ok."

Suddenly he thrust his Yaodao sabre towards him and the point of the scabbard hit his chest. That person cried out "Ai yo" as his body flew away. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded as he didn't expect that his internal energy would be so strong. He again wielded his sheathed sabre as he hit three more masked men and shouted, "You're still not retreating? I'm going to capture you one by one and have you sent to the government here. Everyone will get thirty planks."

The leader of those masked men saw that his martial art was high and was really amazing. He clasped his hand and said, "We respect Chief Ren's good name. We'll back down." He waved his left hand and shouted again, "Devil Sect's Chief Ren is here. Everyone be tactful, let's go." They lifted the corpse and the four people who were hit before. They also threw the fire sticks down and retreated towards the northwest. In a short while, they were all gone from the field. Qin Juan took out Heng-Shan School's medicine to apply to her master's wounds. While Yilin and Zheng E untied their martial sisters' hands and feet. Four disciples then took up the fire sticks and gathered around Dingjing Shi Tai. Everyone saw that her injuries were serious and all their faces had a worried expression. They all kept silent. Dingjing Shi Tai's chest was continuously going up and down. She slowly opened her eyes and asked Linghu Chong, "You... you... are really the past... Devil Sect's.... Chief Ren.... Woxing?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "No."

Dingjing Shi Tai's eyes were losing its liveliness. She was expelling a lot of air but inhaling very little air. It was obvious that she was having great difficulty breathing. She gasped a few times and suddenly in a fierce voice said, "If you're Ren Woxing, even if my Heng-Shan School is defeated to the ground and be... be destroyed. Please don't... don't.." As she said till here, she couldn't draw her breath. Linghu Chong saw that her life was in danger and didn't dare to talk nonsense anymore. He said, "I'm still young, how can I be Ren Woxing?"

Dingjing Shi Tai asked, "Then how come you know.... know that art of Essence Absorbing? You're Ren Woxing's disciple..." Linghu Chong remembered the day he was still at Huashan when Master and Master-wife mentioned Devil Sect many evils. These past two days, he had seen with his own eyes the methods that Devil Sect employed to attack Heng-Shan School. He said, "The Devil Sect has committed many evil acts. How can we still make friends with them? That Ren Woxing isn't my master. Shi Tai, don't worry. My master is a benevolent and kind man. He's heroic and upright. In Wulin, he's looked up by everyone and considered to be a senior hero. Shi Tai has many relations with him."

Dingjing Shi Tai's face revealed a smiling expression. She said, "Then... then I won't worry anymore. I... I won't make it. I want to bother General to bring Heng-Shan School's.... disciples.... to... to... " Her breathing hurried while she talked. After a moment, she said, "Bring them to Fuzhou's Wuxiang Temple ... help them settle down, my school's martial sisters... in a few days... they would arrive."

Linghu Chong said, "Shi Tai, don't worry. Just rest for a few days and you'll recover."

Dingjing Shi Tai asked, "Do you agree?"

Linghu Chong saw her two eyes looking at him full of hope and her face was hoping for him to agree. She was afraid that he might not agree to her request. He said, "I will definitely do Shi Tai's request."

Dingjing Shi Tai smiled, "Amitufo, I've been relieved of this burden. I'm not to be admired. Young hero... who are you really?"

Linghu Chong saw her eyes were unfocused and her breath was very shallow. Her life wasn't long anymore. He couldn't conceal it anymore from her so he put his mouth to her ear and said, "Shi Tai martial uncle, I am Huashan School's ex-disciple Linghu Chong."

Dingjing Shi Tai let out an "ah" and said, "You.... you... Thank you, young hero," and held his hand, her eyes filled with gratitude. She couldn't draw a breath anymore and her breathing stopped<sup>16</sup>.

Linghu Chong called out, "Shi Tai, Shi Tai," as he checked her breath. But she had stopped breathing. He couldn't help but feel mournful. Heng-Shan School's disciples started weeping wildly. The fire sticks were dropped onto the ground and one by one, they were extinguished. All around them became really dark. Linghu Chong thought, "Dingjing Shi Tai was considered to be her generation's expert in martial art. But by accident, she had lost her life tonight in this wilderness. She was only an old nun without anyone else to help her here. Can't the Devil Sect just let her go?"

Suddenly, he thought aloud, "When that masked men's leader went, he said: 'Devil Sect's Chief Ren is here. Everyone be tactful, let's go.' Devil Sect's real name is 'Sun Moon Sect' and when they hear these two words 'Devil Sect', they would feel really insulted. They often kill people who call their sect 'Devil Sect'. So why did this person call his own sect 'Devil Sect'? Since he used the term 'Devil Sect', he must not be from the Devil Sect. So, what's the real origin of this person?" He heard the disciples sorrowfully crying so he didn't disturb them. He leaned on a tree and slept.

When he woke up in the morning, he saw a few senior disciples standing guard besides Dingjing Shi Tai's corpse while the young ladies and nuns slept beside him. Linghu Chong thought, "This General has to take these women to Fuzhou. It'll look really odd and strange, neither fish nor fowl. I also need to go to Fuzhou to look for Master and Master-wife. I don't need to lead them, just protecting them will do."

He coughed and was just about to go when Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhi, and Yizhen quickly went and clasped their hands to him and said, "Poor nuns were rescued by Hero, thanks to Hero's virtue and kindness. There's nothing we wouldn't do to repay Hero's kindness. Martial uncle had met great misfortune and in her last breath entrusted us to Hero. We're waiting for Hero to give orders for us to follow."

They no longer called him General as they believed that this General was a brave person. Linghu Chong said, "What hero? This is not good to hear. When you look at me, just call me General."

Yihe looked at the other disciples and then they all nodded their heads. Linghu Chong said, "Last night I had a dream. In that dream, I saw an old granny poisoned all of you and that you were all lying down inside a big house. How did you all get here?"

Yihe answered, "We didn't know what happened after we were poisoned and fell unconscious. They splashed cold water to wake us all up later. They released the binds on our feet and led us out from the city through a small road. We didn't stop on the road as they kept pulling us trying to hurry. When we walked a bit slow, those thieves whipped us. Even when night fell, we still didn't stop. Then martial uncle caught up with us. They surrounded her telling her to surrender..." When her narrative arrived at this point, she choked and tears started to drop again.

Linghu Chong said, "So there's another small road besides the main one. No wonder we couldn't find any trace of you at all."

Yiqing said, "General, our most important matter right now is to cremate martial uncle's remains. Could you please show us how to do it?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "General doesn't know anything about the matters of monks or nuns. It'd be like a blind person leading if you want me to guide you. The most important matter is for General to get his promotion. I'd better go!" He quickly took large strides and headed towards the north.

The female disciples shouted, "General, General!"

How could Linghu Chong pay attention to them? When he went around a hillside, he went up a tree. He waited up there for around four hours before he saw the Heng-Shan School disciples walked past in sorrow. He followed behind them from far away, secretly protecting them.

When Linghu Chong arrived at an inn in a small town, he thought, "I've already clashed with the Devil Sect and Songshan School groups. This Quanzhou's General Wu Tiande must have a bit of reputation by now. Your granny, this disguise as a general isn't that good anymore." He called the inn's servant and gave him two silver taels to buy him clothes, shoes and cap to remodel his disguise. He told him that he was handling a case to catch thieves so the servant wouldn't tell anyone about what's he's

doing and that if the thieves escaped to the ocean then he would come back and arrest the servant instead.

Later, he arrived at a calm and secluded place. He pulled his fine thick beard off and took off his general's clothes, leather boots, Yaodao sabre, and the government documents. He then changed into the set the inn's servant brought him. He buried the all of the previous disguise in a big hole. From now on, he couldn't be called "General" anymore. As he finished changing into his new disguise, he felt a slight melancholy missing the General character already.

Two days later, he bought a long sword from a weapon shop in Jianning prefecture and put it in his bundle. He again felt happy that he had no other matters. Linghu Chong then observed the Heng-Shan School's nuns entered Fuzhou's wall to enter a monestary. The board in front of the monastery said, "Wuxiang Temple". He sighed and thought, "This burden has been released from my shoulder. Although I promised Dingjing Shi Tai to bring them here, I didn't really bring them here. But they already arrived here safely so I've already fulfilled my promise."

# **Chapter 24: Injustice**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**





**In the picture, Monk Dame's right hand was placed behind his back, and the index finger of his right hand pointed at the ceiling. The gray-haired old man struck out towards the ceiling with both of his palms aiming at the exact spot Damo had pointed at.**

Linghu Chong turned around and walked back towards the main road. He then inquired from a passer-by the direction to the Fortune Prestige Escort House. However he actually didn't feel like going there at the moment, so he just wasted some time by wondering around aimlessly on the street. He didn't know himself whether it's because he didn't dare to meet his Master and Master-Wife or it's because he didn't dare to see his martial sister and martial brother Lin's present situation. But it might also be because he didn't know what to say to them when he met them. So he looked for some distractions to keep himself busy for the moment.

Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, "Little Lin, are you going to drink wine with me?" Linghu Chong felt heat rising up his chest and suddenly felt dizzy. He had travelled more than a thousand li to come to Fujian just to hear this voice and to look at the owner of that voice's face. But right now, hearing that voice, he didn't dare to turn his head around to take a look. All of a sudden, he was frozen there like a statue and tears started to blur his eyes. The way she called him and the word she used to call him made him realise that his martial sister and martial brother Lin were very intimate with each other.

He then heard Lin Pingzhi replied, "I don't have the time. I'm still not familiar with the lessons that Master taught me."

"Those three sword moves are really easy. After we drink wine, I'll tell you the know-how. Alright?" Yue Lingshan persuaded.

"Master and Master-Wife ordered us not to walk around in the city for the next several days so we don't get into trouble. I think we should just go home," Lin Pingzhi reasoned.

Yue Lingshan retorted back, "Then we also can't take a stroll on the main street? I haven't seen any people from Wulin. If a grand hero from Jiang Hu comes here, we wouldn't interfere with him and he also wouldn't interfere with us. So what else is there to be afraid of?"

As they chatted, they gradually walked further. Linghu Chong slowly turned around and saw Yue Lingshan's slender body at the left and Lin Pingzhi's tall body at the right. The two of them were walking shoulder to shoulder along the street. Yue Lingshan was wearing a lake-green gown and a jade green skirt. Lin Pingzhi was wearing a pale yellow gown. Both of their gowns were new and clean. As he looked at their backs, they looked very beautiful as a couple. Linghu Chong felt as if there was something stuck in his chest and he could barely draw his breath.

He had been separated from Yue Lingshan for several months now. Although he had not stopped thinking of her, when he saw her today, he knew that he still loved her deeply. His hand was gripping the sword handle tightly itching to pull it out and cut his own throat. Suddenly, his vision became dark and he felt as if the sky was spinning and the ground was shifting. He sat down on the ground heavily. After a while, he composed himself and slowly stood up. He was still feeling dazed, "I shouldn't see these two ever again. What's the use being miserable when seeing them? Tonight, I'll go secretly to look for Master and Master-Wife. I'll leave them a note to tell them that Ren Woxing has reentered Jianghu and wanted to act against Huashan School and that his martial art is strangely high so they'll have to be very careful. There's also no need to leave my name on the note. Then I'll then go far to another region and won't enter the central plains ever again."

He then returned to the inn and called for wine. After he got heavily drunk, he slept with his clothes on. When he woke up in the middle of the night, he jumped over the wall to get out and went towards the Fortune Prestige Escort

House. The escort house was big and spacious so it was very easy to recognise. But he saw that all the lights inside the escort house had been extinguished and there was no sound at all coming from there. He thought, "I don't know where Master and Master-Wife are. At this time, they must be asleep already."

Just then, he saw a black shadow moving at the top of the wall to his left. That shadow was coming out of the house and it looked to be a woman. This woman was going towards the southwest. She was using her qinggong and it looked like it was his school's qinggong. Linghu Chong used his qi and quickly gave chase. When he saw indistinctly the shape of the body from the back, he knew it was Yue Lingshan. He pondered, "Where's little martial sister going so late at night?"

When Yue Lingshan reached the town's wall, she stopped for a second before continuing on her way. Linghu Chong felt that this was very weird. He followed her at around forty to fifty feet and he kept his steps light to keep her from hearing them. On Fuzhou's road, Yue Lingshan turned east and then west, not hesitating at all when she arrived at an intersection. It seemed that she was familiar with the path she was taking. After going for more than two li, she took a turn into a small alley when she reached the side of a stone bridge.

Linghu Chong flew up to the top of a house and saw Yue Lingshan reaching the end of the alley. She then jumped over the wall of the big house to go inside. The house had a black door with white walls. The wall was lined with rattan trees on the top. Inside the house, there were a few windows bright with lights from the inside. Yue Lingshan walked to a side window in the east and peeped through the window. Suddenly, she made a few sharp sounds, "Zi, zi, zi". At first, Linghu Chong thought that this place was an enemy's house that she was peeping into. But when he suddenly heard her made those sharp sounds, he already guessed what she was

doing. Even so, when he heard the voice of the person inside, he felt really disappointed.

The person inside said, "Martial sister, are you trying to scare me to death? If I die then I'll become a ghost and be just like you."

Yue Lingshan giggled, "Smelly Lin, dead Lin, are you saying I'm a ghost? Careful, I'll dig your heart out."

"You don't need to do it. I'll do it myself and give it to you," replied Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Lingshan laughed, "Ok. I'm going to tell mommy that you're talking to me in this kind of manner."

Lin Pingzhi also laughed, "If Master-Wife asked when and where did I say these words to you, then how are you gonna answer?"

"I'll say today at noon when we were practising sword moves. You didn't have the heart to practise anymore and just spent the time saying those words to me."

"If Master-Wife got angry then she'll lock me up and I won't be able to see you for three months."

Yue Lingshan replied, "Pei! Am I that desirable? If you don't see me then you don't see me! Hey, open the window already!"

Lin Pingzhi pushed the window open while laughing at the same time. Yue Lingshan stepped back and went to the side of the window. Lin Pingzhi said to himself, "I thought martial sister has come just then. But there's no one outside," and slowly closed the window. Yue Lingshan quickly jumped through the window. Linghu Chong was crouching at the corner of the house and was able to hear them joking around. They were talking like there was no one else in the world. Linghu Chong wished that he hadn't heard those words. But unfortunately for him, he heard every word very clearly.

From the reflection on the window, it looked like that the two of them were now hugging each other as their laughter gradually quietened down. Linghu Chong lightly sighed as he dropped his head and walked away when he suddenly heard

Yue Lingshan said, "It's so late, how come you still haven't slept yet? What were you doing?"

Lin Pingzhi answered, "I was waiting for you."

Yue Lingshan giggled, "Pei, you're not afraid losing your teeth for telling lies. How did you know I was gonna come back?"

Lin Pingzhi explained, "The Mountain God calculated from my fluttering heart that my good martial sister would come back."

Yue Lingshan said, "I understand from looking at this house in such a mess that you must be looking for that sword manual. Am I right?"

Linghu Chong stopped and turned back around when he heard the words "sword manual". Then he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "I've been searching this house for the last several months. I've even turned over the roof tiles one by one. The only thing I haven't done is tear down the wall and look at the bricks. Martial sister, there's really nothing in this old house. How about we really tear the walls down and take a look?"

Yue Lingshan answered, "This is your own Lin family's house. If you wanna tear it down or not, it's up to you. Why do you need to ask me for?"

"That's why I must ask you first."

"Why?"

Lin Pingzhi reasoned, "If I don't ask you then who do I ask? In the future, won't your... your surname... surname become mine... hng.. hng... hehe."

Hearing this Yue Lingshan laughed and scolded him, "Smelly Lin, dead Lin, you think marrying me would be that easy, don't you?" Then "pa, pa" sounds were heard. It sounded like that she used her hand to hit him. As the two people were laughing inside the house, Linghu Chong was heartstricken outside. He really wanted to leave but that Evil Resisting Sword Manual was a matter of great importance to him.

When Lin Pingzhi's parents died, he was the only one there and they left him a message to give to their son. It was because of this that he had now suffered a lot of blame. He had learnt Dugu Nine Swords from grand martial uncle Feng but everyone from Huashan School believed that he had deceived them and took that Evil Resisting Sword Manual for himself. Even martial sister suspected him of deceiving them. To be fair, the cause of this matter couldn't be blamed on other people. That day when he practiced sword with Master-Wife, he easily stopped her 'Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning'. At that time, he had spent several months by himself on that cliff. Suddenly, his sword art had advanced by a lot and it wasn't the same as their school's sword art. If he didn't learn another school's sword art then how would he have improved so much? And if this sword art wasn't the Lin family's Evil Resisting sword art then what else could it be?

He had earlier promised grand martial uncle Feng not to reveal anything about him. Thus, he couldn't say anything to argue against other people when they accused him of theft and worse. As he thought tonight, Master must have expelled him because of this although publicly it was said that he was expelled because he was colluding with people from the Devil Sect. But the other major reason must be because they believed that he had embezzled them of the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. Thinking that he had done this despicable conduct, Master wouldn't have tolerated him belonging to the Huashan School anymore. Right now he had to endure the sour taste in his heart as he heard these two people, Yue and Lin, joking around as they also talked about the sword manual. He had to endure it to wait for the truth to be revealed.

He then heard Yue Lingshan said, "You've already been looking for several months now but still haven't found it. Of course, that sword manual isn't here. Why do you still need to tear the wall down? Big brother.... Big brother said those words to you, do you think they're real?"

Linghu Chong ached in his heart, "She still calls me "Big brother"."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Big brother did pass on dad's final words. He said there's an object left by my ancestor in the old house at Xiang Yang Lane and I wasn't allowed to read it. I think Big brother must have borrowed the sword manual and hasn't returned it yet..." Linghu Chong coldly smiled and thought, "You're saying this so politely and didn't say that I've embezzled you. You only said that I borrowed it and hasn't returned it yet. Hng, hng, you don't have to be that restrained in scolding me."

He then heard Lin Pingzhi continued, "But the words "old house at Xiang Yang Lane" can't be made up by big brother. My dad and mum must've told him these words. Big brother and my family weren't acquainted. Also he had never been to Fuzhou so he wouldn't know that Fuzhou has several Xiang Yang Lanes. Furthermore, he wouldn't know that my ancestors' old house is at Xiang Yang Lane. Even people from Fuzhou might not know much about it."

Yue Lingshan said, "If we consider that what your dad and mum said was true then what do we do?"

"When big brother told me my dad's last word, he also mentioned: "don't read". That thing that I'm not allowed to read, is it a classic scripture or some accounting book? I've been thinking about it over and over, and I'm sure it has something to do with the sword manual. Martial sister, since dad's last word mentioned the old house in Xiang Yang Lane, even though the sword manual isn't here, we might still discover some kind of clue here," said Lin Pingzhi.

"That might be a possibility. These last few days, I saw that you've been feeling pretty down. At night, you came to this place instead of staying at the escort house and sleeping. I was worried for you and that's why I came here to take a look. So during the day, you're practising sword and accompanying me while at night you're here digging a nest," said Yue Lingshan jestingly.

Lin Pingzhi weakly smiled and sighed, "My dad and mum died miserably. When I find the sword manual, I'll be able to use it to deal with my enemies and console my dad and mum in heaven."

Yue Lingshan said, "I don't know where big brother is right now. If only I can meet him then it'll be good because I can ask him to return the sword manual to you. He has been practising for a long time already so his sword art must be extremely high now. He should return the sword manual back to its owner. I'd say, little Lin, why don't you give up this idea and stop searching inside this old house. If you don't have this sword manual, then finish learning my dad's Divine Art of Violet Twilight then you'll get your revenge."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Of course. But my dad and mum were tormented and died miserably. If I can use the Lin family's sword art to take revenge then it would be a real revenge which would get rid of the insult done to my dad and mum. Also, our school's Divine Art of Violet Twilight isn't easily passed down to the disciples. I was the last one to enter the school so even if Master and Master-Wife want to give me a look, martial brothers and martial sisters would refuse to accept this. They would say... would say... "

"What would they say?" Yue Lingshan demanded.

"They would say that you and I are not a real couple. That it's merely for me to have a look at the Divine Art of Violet Twilight and to get Master and Master-Wife's favor," explained Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Lingshan said, "Pei! I don't care what they say, let them say whatever they want. I only need to know that your heart is real then everything's ok."

Lin Pingzhi laughed, "How do you know that I'm real?"

A "pai" sound was heard. But Linghu Chong didn't know whether she hit his shoulder or his back. She then spat out, "I know that your heart is false and insincere, you're heartless and cruel!"



Lin Pingzhi laughed, "Ok, ok.... you've been here for a long time already, you should go back. I'll take you back to the escort house. If Master or Master-Wife find out then I'll be in big trouble."

"You're getting rid of me, aren't you? I can go back by myself. I don't need you to take me back." She didn't sound pleased at all. Linghu Chong knew that she must be pouting her small mouth at this moment and looking angry. Her expression must be attractive right now.

Lin Pingzhi said, "Master said that Devil Sect's former Chief, Ren Woxing, has reappeared in Jianghu. I also heard that he had arrived in Fujian and that this person's martial art is immeasurably deep. He's also heartless and ruthless. If when you're walking alone late at night and unfortunately meet him, then... then what would you do?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So Master knew about this matter already. Must be because I've made such a big disturbance in Xianxia mountain range. Everyone must be saying that Ren Woxing has reappeared. How can master not heard about this news? I don't need to write that note anymore."

Yue Lingshan said, "Hng, so if you take me back and we unfortunately meet him then you'll be able to kill or capture him?"

Lin Pingzhi answered, "You're teasing me again. You already knew that my martial art isn't that high. Of course, I'm no match for him but I only wanna be together with you. If we were to die, then we should die together."

Yue Lingshan softly said, "Little Lin, I didn't mean that your martial art isn't high enough. You're practising so hard that in the future, you'll surely be stronger than me. In fact if you're more familiar with the sword art right now and we fight in a real battle, I probably won't be your match."

Lin Pingzhi laughed lightly and said, "Only if you use your left hand then maybe we can have a competition."

"I'll help you look around. You're already too familiar with this house so you won't notice anything strange. But maybe I'll be able to recognise something," said Yue Lingshan.

Lin Pingzhi said, "Alright. Go have a look and see if there's something strange here."

After that Linghu Chong heard the sound of drawers and tables being pulled. After some time, Yue Lingshan said, "Everything is so ordinary here. Is there any unusual place in this house?"

Lin Pingzhi thought for a while and said, "Unusual place? No."

Yue Lingshan asked, "Where's the courtyard to practise martial art?"

Lin Pingzhi said, "We don't have a courtyard to practise martial art here. When my great grandfather opened the escort house, he moved everything and lived there. Both my grandfather and father also lived and practised their martial art in the escort house. Also, dad said the word "read", what's there to read in the courtyard?"

Yue Lingshan said, "That's true. Let's go to your family's study room and have a look."

Lin Pingzhi said, "We're an escort house. We have an accounting room but no study room. The accounting room is also in the escort house."

Yue Lingshan said, "That thing is really hard to find. What's there to read in this house?"

Lin Pingzhi said, "I've been pondering over what big brother told me. He said dad told me not to read what great grandad left me. But I think that this sentence might be the other way around, it might be that my dad was telling me to look for this thing left by my great grandad in this old house<sup>17</sup>. But what's there to read in this house? I've been searching all over this place but I've only found my great granddad's Buddhist scriptures."

Yue Lingshan jumped up and clapped her hands. She said, "Buddhist scriptures! That's very good. Ancestor Da Mo

left sword manuals inside Buddhist scriptures. So it's not uncommon for this."

When Linghu Chong heard what Yue Lingshan said, he got excited. He thought, "If martial brother Lin can find that sword manual inside a Buddhist scripture then it'll be good. He won't suspect me of embezzling him anymore."

But he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "I've already thought of this. I've read not only one or two scriptures, or even eight or ten scriptures. I'm afraid I've even read more than one hundred scriptures. I've gone and bought Jingang scripture, Fahua scripture, Xin scripture, Lengqie scripture and compared them all with my great granddad's Buddhist scriptures. But not one word is different. They're all normal scriptures."

Yue Lingshan said, "Then there's no point reading them."

She thought deeply and suddenly said, "Have you looked in between the scriptures binding?"

Lin Pingzhi pondered, "The binding? I haven't thought of that. Let's go take a look."

They each took a candle and walked out of the room hand in hand going towards the back courtyard. While Linghu Chong followed them from the top of the house by looking at lights coming out of the windows. They finally arrived at a room facing the northwest. Linghu Chong followed them and went down to the courtyard. He then peeped through a crack in the window.

Inside the room was a Buddhist hall. A water painting of Da Mo's back was hung in the middle of the room. It was portraying the period of nine years when Da Mo meditated facing a wall. At the east side of the hall were a very old kneeling mat and a meditation table. On the table were a wooden fish, a small wooden hammer and a closed Buddhist scripture. Linghu Chong thought, "This was the place where Senior Lin established the Fortune Prestige Escort House. During those days, his name shook the world and he must have killed quite a few people. In his later years, he must

have come here to confess for his killings." He then imagined a grand hero of the Jianghu, with his long white hair flying around, sitting alone in this hall, immersed in reading Buddhist scriptures while striking the wooden fish.

Yue Lingshan picked a scripture up and said, "Let's take apart the scriptures and see if we can find this thing in the binding. If we can't find anything then we'll just patch the scriptures again. What do you think?"

"Alright," answered Lin Pingzhi.

He picked a scripture up and started to pull apart the book-bindings. He then spread the scripture pages around the floor to see if there's any writing on the part of the pages that were bound. While Yue Lingshan took apart another scripture and put up each page in front of the candle to see if there's anything. Linghu Chong was looking at her back but he was able to see her jade white wrist. She was still wearing that silver bracelet on her left hand. Sometimes, he was able to see the side of her face as she gave a look to Lin Pingzhi and smiled at him before going back to take the scriptures apart. He didn't know whether it was because of the candle or because her cheeks had turned red, but the side of her face looked like a ripe peach.

Linghu Chong was standing quietly outside the window feeling sentimental while the two of them tore apart scripture after scripture. Before long, twelve scriptures were torn apart and were now on the table. Suddenly, Linghu Chong heard a sound behind his back. He quickly pulled back from the window and turned his head around. He saw the shadows of two people coming from the south side of the house. They made a hand signal before jumping down to the courtyard and noiselessly landing on the ground. The two of them then went to the window to look inside the Buddhist hall.

After some time, he heard Yue Lingshan disappointingly said, "We've already taken apart all the scriptures. There's nothing there." She was suddenly excited and continued, "Little Lin, I think we should bring over a basin of water."

Lin Pingzhi asked, "For what?"

Yue Lingshan answered, "When I was small, I heard daddy told me a story about manuscripts immersed in acid. Then they would write on it and when it's dried, the letters would disappear. But when the pages were wetted, the letters would appear."

Linghu Chong's heart turned sour as he remembered the time his Master told this story. Yue Lingshan was only eight or nine years old and he was only around seventeen or eighteen years old. Remembering those past days, the memories bubbled over in his heart. He remembered that day when he went with her to catch crickets. He took the biggest and strongest cricket and gave it to her. But her cricket still lost to his in a fight, so she wept incessantly while he tried to comfort her for a long time. Finally, he was able to comfort her before the two of them went to Master to ask him for a story. Remembering these events, tears started to bubble up in his eyes.

Then he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "Right, no harm in trying." As he turned around to go out, Yue Lingshan said, "I'll go with you." The two of them went out hand in hand. Those two people hiding beneath the window were holding their breath and remaining still. After some time, Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan came back to the Buddhist hall with a basin of water. They then soaked seven or eight pages of the scriptures in the basin. Lin Pingzhi couldn't wait anymore and took out a page out of the water and held it up against the candle's light. But there was no new letter appearing on the page. The two of them had tried more than twenty pages but there was still no clue at all. Lin Pingzhi said, "We don't need to test anymore. There's no letters appearing on these pages." After Lin Pingzhi said these words, those two people hiding beneath the window quietly moved to the door and pushed it open. Lin Pingzhi asked, "Who's there?"

The two people rushed in, moving like the wind. Lin Pingzhi lifted his hand ready to fight as one person attacked

the side of his body. Yue Lingshan already pulled half her sword out when the enemy's two fingers were thrust towards her eyes. She quickly let go of her sword handle and swept her hand up to block the attack. Without missing a beat, that person changed the direction of his attack and was now stabbing towards her throat. Yue Lingshan was astonished and retreated two steps when she hit the side of the meditation table and couldn't go back anymore. That person immediately lifted his left hand and chopped down on her head. Yue Lingshan raised her two palms to block the attack but unexpectedly this attack was a fake as that person stabbed an acupoint on Yue Lingshan's waist with his right hand. She leaned on the table unable to move.

Linghu Chong saw everything that went on in that room and at the moment wasn't worried about their lives. He was thinking that there was no hurry to save them. Furthermore, he wasn't sure of the background of these enemies. Also, the enemies were looking around the hall right now. One took the kneeling mat and tore it in two. While the other one smashed the wooden fish into seven or eight pieces. Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan were unable to talk or move when they saw these two people tearing the kneeling mat and smashing the wooden fish. It was obvious that they were looking for the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. They both thought the same thing, "How come we didn't think that the sword manual might be in the kneeling mat or the wooden fish." But there was nothing inside the mat or the wooden fish and they both felt happy.

The two intruders were around fifty years old. One was bald and the other one was full of white hair. Those two people moved really fast and before long all the objects on the table were broken to pieces already. They then turned their attention to the portrait of Da Mo. That bald old man extended his hand to grab the portrait but the white-haired old man extended his hand to block it and shouted, "Wait, look at where his finger is pointing to!" Linghu Chong, Lin

Pingzhi, and Yue Lingshan immediately looked at the painting. They saw Da Mo's left hand was behind his back holding a sword manual and his right hand was pointing towards the roof.

The bald old man asked, "What's so strange about his fingers?"

The white-haired old man answered, "I don't know! Let's have a look first." He jumped straight up and aimed his two palms at the roof where the portrait of Da Mo was pointing. With a crash, dust and bits of roof tiles started to rain down.

The bald old man asked, "What's there.... " He only said these two words when a red Buddhist robe floated down from the hole in the roof.

The white-haired old man extended his hand and grabbed the robe. He then took a look at it under the candle's light. He said, "It's... it's here." He was overjoyed and his voice was trembling. The bald old man asked, "What?" The white-haired old man said, "Look at it yourself."

Linghu Chong squinted his eyes and saw that there were many small words written on the Buddhist robe. The bald old man said, "Could this be the Evil Resisting Sword Manual?" The white-haired old man said, "Most likely this is the sword manual. Haha, we two brothers have done this great service tonight. Brother, put it away." The bald old man was so happy that his mouth was open as he folded the robe and put it in his bosom. He pointed at Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan with his left hand and asked, "Shall we kill them?" Linghu Chong gripped his sword handle waiting for the white-haired old man to reveal his murderous intention before rushing in there and killing these two old men. Who would have thought that the white-haired old man would say, "We already have the sword manual. Let's not pick a fight with Huashan School. Let them go." The two people then walked out of the Buddhist hall and jumped out over the wall.

Linghu Chong immediately jumped over the wall to follow them and saw that those two old men were extremely

quick with their footsteps. Linghu Chong was afraid to lose those two in the dark so he quickened his steps but still kept a distance of twenty feet between them. The two old men went even faster but Linghu Chong kept up with them. Suddenly, they stopped and turned around. Linghu Chong saw a sudden flash of light and felt his right shoulder and right arm hurting. Unexpectedly, his shoulder and arm had already been slashed by their sabres. These two men suddenly stopping, suddenly turning around and suddenly slashing their sabres out were like that of thunder suddenly striking down.

Although Linghu Chong's internal energy was deep and his sword art was brilliant, he was still inferior to first-class fighters by a big level when faced with sudden changes in the battlefield or encountering strange and unusual enemies' skills. The enemies' attacks were so fast that it didn't even need mentioning that he didn't manage to use his sword to fight back. He didn't even have enough time to reach his sword handle before he got heavily injured.

The sabre art of the two old men were very fast as they quickly followed with a second slash. Linghu Chong was startled and hastily jumped back. Fortunately, his internal energy was deep which allowed him to jump back for twenty feet with one leap. He then jumped back again for another twenty feet. These two old men saw that he had been heavily injured but he was still able to jump really fast and far. They were alarmed but they still rushed forward. Linghu Chong quickly turned around and ran away.

Initially, his injured shoulder and arm didn't hurt that much. But now, the pain was so severe that he felt like fainting. He thought, "These two people have stolen the Buddhist robe with the Evil Resisting Sword Manual written on it. I need it to right this injustice I'm being blamed for. I must take it back and return it to martial brother Lin." He endured the pain on his arm and shoulder as he extended his hand to grip his sword handle. As he pulled the long sword



out, it stopped halfway. Unexpectedly, his injured right hand was unable to pull the sword out any further. His right hand had no more energy. He then heard the sound of the wind at the back of his head as the enemies' sabres were chopping down on his head. Linghu Chong gathered his qi and quickly leaped forward while his left hand forcibly pulled on his belt tearing it. He then gripped his sword with his left hand and shook it free from the scabbard. When he felt the cold air rushing towards him again, he turned around and saw the two sabres chopping down.

He leaped back another step. The sky would get brighter soon, but at the moment it was the darkest time just before dawn. Besides the flashes of the sabres, he could see nothing else. When he learned the Dugu Nine Swords, he needed to look at the weakness of the enemy's moves and attack that point. But right now, he wasn't able to see the enemies' movements so he couldn't use his sword art at all. Just then, he felt his left arm also hurt as an enemy's sabre scratched it. He rushed towards a long street with his left hand gripping the sword and pressing down on the injury on his right shoulder to stem the blood from flowing down to the ground.

As the two people chased him, they saw that his steps were really quick that they wouldn't be able to chase him down. Thinking that it was good already that they had grabbed the sword manual, they didn't want to linger anymore so they stopped chasing. They turned around and went away. Linghu Chong shouted, "Hey, bold thieves, you wanna run after stealing?" and turned around to chase. This angered the two people that they also turned around and wielded their sabres to chop him. Linghu Chong didn't want to cross swords with them so he quickly turned around and ran away again. He secretly prayed, "Someone please pass by carrying a lamp." After running for several steps, he thought of an idea. He quickly jumped onto a roof and looked around. He spotted a house at his left with the light from the window lighting up the area around it. He quickly went to

that lighted area. But those two old men had again stopped chasing.

Linghu Chong stooped down, grabbed two roof tiles, and threw it towards them. He shouted, "You've robbed Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual! One bald, one white-haired, you want to escape to the end of the world but Wulin's heroes will capture both of you and cut your corpses into pieces." Those two roof tiles broke as they hit the slab stones on the street.

When the two old men heard him mention the "Evil Resisting Sword Manual", they quickly jumped onto the roof to give chase. Linghu Chong felt his legs becoming weaker and losing his strength. Fiercely, he drew a breath and ran to the lighted area at top speed. Suddenly, he staggered and fell on the ground below. However, he quickly somersaulted using the "Carp's Leap" move and landed on his feet. Then he leaned back against the wall.

The two old men lightly jumped down and approached him separately from his left and right. The bald old man smiling fiercely said, "I've given you one life but you didn't wanna go." Linghu Chong saw his baldhead was shining like a crystal. His heart shivered, "So it's dawn already." He laughed, "Which house or school are you from? Why do you want to kill me?"

The white-haired old man lifted his sabre and slashed it down to split his head in two. Linghu Chong threw his sword into his right hand and lightly pierced his throat. That bald old man was startled and quickly brandished his sabre as he rushed forward. Linghu Chong slashed his sword towards the hand carrying the sabre and cut his wrist off. Then he pointed the sword at his throat and said, "Tell me who you two really are and I'll let you live." The bald old man laughed. Looking mournful, he said, "We brothers have rarely met a match when running amuck in Jianghu. Today, I'll die under your honor's sword. Really admirable. But I don't know your honor's name. I'll die... die with regrets."

Linghu Chong saw that although he had lost a hand, he was still unafraid. He respected him deeply for this so he said, "I was forced to defend myself, actually I'm not acquainted with you two at all. Handless man, I'm sorry. Sir, please give me the Buddhist robe. Then we don't have to keep going."

That bald old man said, "How can Bald Eagle surrender?" and with a flash of his left hand, he pierced his own heart with a dagger.

Linghu Chong thought, "This person rather die than surrender. What a unique character!"

He then stooped down to take out that Buddhist robe but he felt dizzy and knew that he had lost a lot of blood. He ripped his gown and carelessly struggled to tie his injured shoulder and arm with the cloth. Only then did he take out the Buddhist robe from the bosom of that bald old man. He then felt dizzy again and immediately took a few deep breaths. The sky was brighter now and he was able to recognise the road. He then walked back towards Lin Pingzhi's old house on Xiang Yang Lane.

After walking for a couple hundred feet, he felt he couldn't support himself anymore. He thought, "If I fall down now, I won't be able to protect my name but after I am dead, everyone will think that I did steal the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. With that thing on my body, if I die now my name will be like dirt." So he gathered his energy to continue walking and finally arrived at Xiang Yang Lane. But the Lin family house's main door was closed. Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan had been knocked out by those people so there was no one to open the door. He wanted to jump over the wall but he had no more energy left. He knocked on the door a few times before kicking the door.

But his kick wasn't able to open the big door. Strained to the utmost at this point, he staggered and passed out. When he woke up, he felt that he was lying on a bed. He opened his eyes and saw the Yue Buqun couple in front of the bed.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed and called out, "Master, Master-Wife... I.... I...." He was really excited and tears started to drop. He struggled to sit up. Yue Buqun didn't answer but asked, "What matter do you have here?" Linghu Chong said, "Little martial sister? Is... Is she ok?" Madam Yue answered, "She's fine! How... how come you're in Fuzhou?" Her voice was full of concern and her eyes were red already.

"Martial brother Lin's Evil Resisting Sword Manual was stolen by two old men. I killed those two people and brought it back. Those two... those two people are likely good fighters from the Devil Sect," Linghu Chong explained and reached inside his bosom but that Buddhist robe was gone.

He quickly asked, "Where... where's that Buddhist robe?"

"What's that?" Madam Yue asked.

"There were words written on that Buddhist robe. It was most likely the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual."

"If that's Pingzhi's then he should be the one taking care of it," Madam Yue said.

"Yes. Master-Wife, are you and Master well? Martial brothers and sisters are all well?"

Madam Yue used her sleeve to wipe her teary eyes before saying, "Everyone's fine."

"How did I end up here? Did Master and Master-Wife rescue me?" Linghu Chong queried.

"When I arrived at Pingzhi's old house this morning, I saw you passed out on the ground," Madam Yue explained.

Linghu Chong groaned, "Lucky that Master-Wife found me. Otherwise, if the Devil Sect's people found me first, I'd have been dead."

He knew that Master-Wife came to Xiang Yang Lane to look for her daughter when she didn't see her early in the morning. It was just that it was awkward to mention it right now.

"You said you killed two evil people from the Devil Sect. How did you know they're from the Devil Sect?" Yue Buqun wondered.

Linghu Chong answered, "When disciple was going south, I've run across many Devil Sect's people on the road. I've also fought with them a few times already. These two people's martial arts were weird. They're definitely not from our orthodox schools." Secretly he was feeling happy, "I've returned martial brother Lin's Evil Resisting Sword Manual. Master, Master-Wife, and little martial sister wouldn't suspect me anymore. Also, since I've killed those two Devil Sect's evils, Master wouldn't blame me for colluding with the Devil Sect anymore."

Who would have thought that Yue Buqun's complexion would turn pale on hearing Linghu Chong's reply. He snorted and scolded, "You're still talking nonsense! Do you think I can be deceived that easily?"

Linghu Chong was alarmed and quickly said, "Disciple doesn't dare to fool Master."

Yue Buqun's voice quaked, "Who's your master? I've already disowned you as my disciple."

Linghu Chong quickly got up from the bed and knelt down on the ground. He kowtowed, "Disciple has done many wrong things, I'm willing to receive punishments from Master. But... but my expulsion from the school, I request Master to take me back."

Yue Buqun moved aside not receiving his kowtow. He then coldly said, "The daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren already favors you and you've also been cooperating with them for a long time already. Why do you still need me as your master?"

Linghu Chong was confused, "Daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren? Master, I don't know what you're saying? Although I've heard of that Ren... Ren Woxing's daughter, I've never met her before."

Madam Yue rebuked him lightly, "Chong'er, even now, why are you still telling lies?" She sighed and continued, "That lady Ren gathered those evil people of Jianghu at the

top of Five-Tyrant Ridge to give you medications. That day, didn't we go..."

Linghu Chong was greatly astonished. His voice was trembling as he said, "That lady on the Five-Tyrant Ridge, she's... she's... Yingying... she's Chief Ren's daughter?"

"Get up before speaking," Madam Yue requested.

Linghu Chong slowly stood up. His heart was at a loss and he kept on mumbling, "She's... she's Chief Ren's daughter? How... how can this be?"

Madam Yue was angry and she wasn't pleased at all, "Why are you still telling lies to Master and Master-Wife?"

Yue Buqun indignantly said, "Who's his master or Master-Wife?" He extended his hand and hit the table repeatedly. With each hit, a piece of the table broke away.

Linghu Chong was frightened, "Disciple doesn't dare lie to Master and Master-Wife..."

Yue Buqun fiercely said, "I have eyes but I couldn't see and had accepted such a shameless child as a disciple. I'm very ashamed to face the heroes of the realm. You want to dirty my name, don't you? If you ever call us "Master, Master-Wife" again, then I'll kill you right now." He was extremely angry and his face was turning purple readying his qi.

Linghu Chong answered, "Yes!" as he put his hand on the edge of the bed to support himself. His face was pale and his body was shaking violently. "They did give me some treatments on that ridge. But... but they never told me that she... she was Chief Ren's daughter."

Madam Yue said, "You're bright and clever, you're also very alert, how could you not have figured it out? She's only a very young lady, but with only one word from her, she could control all those evil people. Every one of them struggled to be on that ridge only to give some kind of treatment for you. Besides the daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren, who else has such a big reputation?"

"Disc... I... I thought she was only an old granny at that time," Linghu Chong explained.

"She was disguising herself?" Madam Yue asked.

"She didn't. It's just... it's just that I've never seen her face before," Linghu Chong said.

Yue Buqun uttered a laugh but there was no sign of laughter on his face. Madam Yue sighed, "Chong'er, you're already grown up. Your character has also changed. You're not taking the words that I just said into your heart."

Linghu Chong said, "Master... Master... the words that you said, I... I..." What he wanted to say was: "The words that you said, I wouldn't dare to violate." Master and Master-Wife had repeatedly told him not to make friends with people from Devil Sect. But with the connection he had with Yingying, Xiang Wentian, and Ren Woxing, how can they just merely be called "friends"?

Madam Yue continued, "That daughter of Chief Ren was so nice to you so she gathered so many people to treat your illness. Because of that you were able to live. So maybe this is excusable..."

Yue Buqun indignantly said, "What do you mean excusable? Are you allowed to stop at nothing just to live?" He usually treated Madam Yue very courteously as if she was an honored guest. But today, he had repeatedly spoken to her in a fierce manner and had also cut her off in the middle of her sentence. It was obvious that he was in an uncontrollable rage. Madam Yue understood her husband's mood so she didn't consult with him before continuing, "But why were you together with one of the Devil Sect elders, Xiang Wentian, and killed many of our orthodox school's people? Both of your hands are stained with their blood, you... you quickly get out of here!"

Linghu Chong's back was drenched with cold sweat as he remembered that day on Liang Pavillion. He was welcoming the enemies together with Xiang Wentian and many people from the orthodox schools died under his hand. But at that time the fight was very dangerous so if he didn't kill them, he would have been the one to get killed. There was really

nothing he could do differently at all. But these blood debts would forever be on his hands.

Madam Yue said, "Below the Five-Tyrant Ridge, you joined hands with that Devil Sect's young Lady Ren again to kill a few Shaolin and Kunlun Schools' disciples. Chong'er, I've long regarded you as my own son but these things that have happened so far, your... your Master-Wife is powerless to protect you anymore." As she said this, two teardrops fell on her cheeks.

Linghu Chong bleakly said, "Son has really done some unpardonable wrongs. But I'm responsible for what I did; I cannot let Huashan School's reputation to be covered in dirt. I request you, two honourable, to open a court of law and invite every house and every school to come and witness my execution according to Huashan School's rules."

Yue Buqun sighed, "Master Linghu, if you were still my Huashan School's disciple today, then this might work. Your death would have protected Huashan School's reputation as you would have still been my disciple. But I've already announced to the whole realm about your expulsion from the school. Hereafter, what do your actions have to do with my Huashan School? Also, what position do I have to put you in your place? Hey, hey, the just and evil cannot coexist together. Next time when you're doing evil things, if I bump into you at that time, then I would definitely kill you. I can't just let you do whatever you want."

When he spoke until here, someone called out from the outside, "Master, Master-Wife." It was Lao Denuo.

Yue Buqun asked, "What is it?"

"There are people outside paying a visit to Master and Master-Wife. He said he's Songshan School's Zhong Zhen. His two martial brothers are also here," Lao Denuo answered.

Yue Buqun said, "Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen, he's also in Fujian? I'll come out straight away," and he made his way outside.



Madam Yue looked at Linghu Chong, her eyes were brimming with tears and it looked like she was asking him to wait here. She turned her head again looking like she had something to say before going out of the room.

Linghu Chong had long regarded Master-Wife as his own mother. He felt extremely remorseful seeing her tender affection towards him. He considered, "I can blame my unrestrained behaviour for a lot of things that have happened. I didn't distinguish "right and wrong" and "good and evil" clearly. Brother Xiang is evidently not a noble person. Why didn't I find out clearly before helping him fight? If I die now, it's no big deal. But not only it would make Master and Master-Wife lose face in front of Wulin's heroes, all the other martial brothers and martial sisters would also lose their faces because people would say Huashan School has produced such an unworthy disciple." He thought more, "So Yingying is Chief Ren's daughter. No wonder Old Man and Zu Qianqiu were so respectful towards her. She thoughtlessly said a word and all those Jianghu heroes were banished to the East China Sea's Huang Island and wouldn't be able to come back to the central plains ever again. Ai, I should have realised it earlier. In Wulin, besides a leader of the Devil Sect, who else has such power? But when she was with me, she was coy and bashful, she was even more so compared to little martial sister. Who would have expected that she would be a head of the Devil Sect? But Chief Ren was imprisoned by Dongfang Bubai at the bottom of the West Lake. How did his daughter get so much power?"

His mind was like a tide, going up and down indeterminately. Suddenly he heard footsteps approaching and a person entered the room quickly. It was the person he had been thinking of day and night. The person whom he had borne in his mind all the time; it was his little martial sister. Linghu Chong called out, "Little martial sister! You... " He was at a loss for words.

Yue Lingshan said, "Big martial brother, quickly... quickly get out of here. Songshan School's people are looking for you." She was very anxious as she was telling him this. But when Linghu Chong saw her, all the matters that were in his mind were all forgotten. What Songshan School? He didn't even hear what she said. All sorts of emotions were bubbling inside of him as he was looking at her. Sweet, sour, bitter, hot, and all sort of other tastes were rushing forth in his mind.

Yue Lingshan saw him staring at her. Her face turned red as she said, "It's someone surnamed Zhong, he brought two of his martial brothers here. He said that you killed some Songshan School's people and he had chased you till here."

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded and was at a loss, "I killed some people from the Songshan School? I didn't..."

Suddenly, the door to the room banged open and Yue Buqun walked in. He was angry and said fiercely, "Linghu Chong, you've done very well! You've killed Songshan School's seniors but you tried to deceive me by saying that they were Devil Sect's villains."

"Disc... I... I killed Songshan School's seniors? I... I didn't..." Linghu Chong stammered.

" 'White Hair Immortal' Bu Chen, 'Bald Eagle' Sha Tianjiang, didn't you kill these two people?" Yue Buqun asked indignantly.

When Linghu Chong heard the nicknames of these two people, he recalled what that bald old man, who committed suicide, said before he died: "How can Bald Eagle surrender?" Then the other person must be 'White Hair Immortal' Bu Chen. "One white-haired old man and one bald old man, I killed those two people. But... but I didn't know they were from Songshan School. Since they were using sabres, it's definitely not Songshan School's martial art."

"So you killed these two people?" Yue Buqun looked stern as he asked this question again.

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered.

"Dad, those white-haired old man and bald old man... " Yue Lingshan pleaded.

Yue Buqun cut her off, "Get out! Who asked you to come in? Do I want you to interfere while I'm talking here?"

Yue Lingshan could only drop her head and slowly walked out of the room.

Linghu Chong felt miserable and happy at the same time, "Although martial sister and martial brother Lin are on good terms, she still considered me as a friend. She bravely rebuked her father. And before, she alerted me to quickly run away to avoid disaster."

Yue Buqun laughed coldly, "Do you know all the martial arts of the Five Mountains Sword Schools? These two people, Bu and Sha, came from Songshan School. Since you absolutely have no rules or regulations whatsoever; I don't know what kind of despicable method you used to kill them. But Songshan School tracked the traces of blood all the way back to Pingzhi's old house at Xiang Yang Lane. They then investigated further and traced the clues to here. Now, martial brother Zhong from Songshan School is outside as my guest. Do you have anything else to say?"

Madam Yue walked into the room and said, "They never saw Chong'er killing the two people. They were only relying on the trail of blood. How can they be sure that it was done by someone inside the escort house? Why don't we just tell them that we don't know anything?"

Yue Buqun indignantly retorted, "Martial sister, even until now, you still want to protect this "stop at no evil" good-for-nothing kid? I'm the leader of Huashan School. How can I tell lies just because of this animal? You... You... how can we do that? We mustn't bring ruin and shame upon ourselves."

For the past several years, Linghu Chong had always known that Master and Master-Wife went from martial brother and sister to husband and wife. If he could be like that for one day with little martial sister, then he'll be satisfied and would have no other wish in this life. But when he saw Master

talking so fiercely to Master-Wife, he suddenly thought, "If little martial sister were my wife, I'll do whatever she wants me to do. I'll do it if it was a good thing. I'll still do it if it was a bad thing. I'd never brush away her idea in the slightest bit. Even if she wanted me to do ten really evil things, I'd do it in a heartbeat." Yue Buqun suddenly saw Linghu Chong's expression becoming tender and soft with a hint of a smile. Linghu Chong's eyes shone passionately as he thought of that girl standing outside the room. Yue Buqun lashed out "Little animal, what kind of evil plan are you cooking up now?"

Yue Buqun's loud shout woke Linghu Chong up abruptly from his flights of fancy. When he looked up, he saw that his master's face had turned purple and he had his hand raised ready to strike his head. Suddenly, the feeling of joy washed over him as he felt ready to give up all the bitter things that had happened to him. Today, under his Master's hand, he would die happily and be freed. His heart yearned for death especially with little martial sister besides him to see him get killed by her own father.

Gazing at Yue Lingshan, he smiled slightly and waited for his Master's palm to strike down. He heard the wind whistle as Yue Buqun's palm descended. But suddenly, Madam Yue cried out, "No! You can't!" as her finger stabbed towards her husband's "Yu Zhen" acupoint at the back of his head. The two of them had been practising their martial arts together since they were small and were both very familiar with each other's skills. This acupoint that Madam Yue was attacking was a fatal point so Yue Buqun automatically turned around to block the strike while Madam Yue quickly put herself in front of Linghu Chong.

Yue Buqun's face turned pale and indignantly asked, "What... what are you doing?"

"Chong'er, quickly go! Go!" Madam Yue hurriedly urged.

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I'm not going. If Master wants to kill me then he can kill me. I deserve this

punishment for my sins."

Madam Yue stamped her foot and insisted further, "Now that I'm here, he can't kill you. Quickly go, go really far and never come back."

Yue Buqun snorted, "Hng, if he goes then what do we tell those three people from Songshan School waiting outside?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So Master is worried that he might not be able to deal with Zhong Zhen and his brothers. I should go and meet them in his place." Deciding this, he declared, "Alright, I'll go meet them." and went out of the room in big strides.

Madam Yue pleaded after him, "You cannot go. They'll kill you."

But Linghu Chong kept on walking very fast and in no time at all, he arrived at the main hall.

Sure enough, he saw Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen, Divine Whip Deng Bagong, and Bright-Haired Lion Gao Kexin sitting on the guest seats. Linghu Chong went and took a seat opposite to them. He coldly questioned, "You three, what are you doing here?"

At this moment, wearing the clothes of a servant and having no fake beards attached to his face, Linghu Chong looked completely different from the General they had met that night. When Zhong Zhen and his brothers saw this wretched looking and blood-stained young servant being rude to them as soon as he had entered the room, they all became angry.

Gao Kexin shouted, "What kind of thing\* are you?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "You three people, what kind of north south<sup>18</sup> are you?"

Gao Kexin was startled and wondered, "How can it be called "north south"?" But he decided that it was just badly spoken. Indignantly he demanded, "Go and get Mr. Yue out here! Do you think you are good enough to talk to us?"

In the mean time, Yue Buqun, Madam Yue, Yue Lingshan, and the multitudes of Huashan School's disciples had arrived

by the screen door outside the hall. They all heard how Linghu Chong answered Gao Kexin's question. When Yue Lingshan heard Linghu Chong asking "You three people, what kind of north south are you?", she thought it was very funny even though her big martial brother was being rude. But she knew that because big martial brother had killed people from Songshan School, these three masters and big martial brother would definitely have to fight later and the fight would unavoidably be fierce. Father and mother would be unable to help big martial brother and she didn't know what to do herself. Her heart was so filled with anxiety that she didn't laugh at the joke.

Linghu Chong taunted, "Who's Mr. Yue? Ah, you mean the Huashan School's leader. I came here looking for him. Songshan School has two unworthy disciples, one is called White-Haired Monster Bu Chen, and the other one is Bald Owl Sha Tianjiang. I killed both of them already. But I heard Songshan School has three more chaps hiding in the Fortune Prestige Escort House. I came to ask Mr. Yue to hand over these people to me but he didn't consent. This irritates me, really irritates me!"

He continued by shouting loudly, "Mr. Yue, there are three idiots here from Songshan School. There's one called Soft Sword Zhong Zhen, another one called Little Ghost Deng Bagong, and the other one called Scabies Skin Cat Gao Kexin. Please quickly bring them out here. I have debts to collect from them. You want to protect them? That won't do! You Five Mountains Sword Schools have the same root but different branches. How can I settle this debt?"

When Yue Buqun and the rest of the people heard his taunts, they weren't shocked at all. They all knew that he was saying all this to let everyone know that Huashan School had nothing to do with him. These three people from the Songshan School had been famous for a long time already, especially the Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen. It was obvious to the people outside that Linghu Chong knew the

backgrounds of the Songshan School's people already. It was no small matter when Linghu Chong defeated Feng Buping from the sword sect and blinded the eyes of fifteen swordsmen. But at the moment, he was heavily injured and he might not even be able to stand up. They were perplexed as to why was he so daring as to rashly challenge three master-hands?

Gao Kexin was so angry that he jumped up and drew the sword out of his scabbard. As he was about to stab his sword towards Linghu Chong, Zhong Zhen held up his hand to stop him. He then asked Linghu Chong, "What's your honour's name?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Haha, I recognise you but you don't recognise me. Your Songshan School wants to combine the Five Mountains Sword Schools into one by taking over the other four schools. You three "north south" came to Fujian to steal the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual and to kill important people from the Huashan and Heng-Shan School. All these plots of yours; I already know all about them. Haha, very funny, very funny!"

When Yue Buqun and Madam Yue saw what was happening, they both thought, "Why is he unnecessarily saying all these nonsensical talk?"

Zhong Zhen was surprised, "Which school is your honour from?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Big temple didn't want to accept me, small temple also didn't want to accept me. I'm a masterless lonely soul wandering alone on wild mountains and plains. I won't bother with your Songshan School's business. You don't need to worry. Haha, haha." His laughter sounded miserable.

Zhong Zhen said, "Your honour is not from Huashan School so we cannot disturb Mr. Yue anymore. Why don't we go outside to talk?" These words were said softly but his eyes were fierce and were full of murderous intent. At this point, Zhong Zhen had already decided to kill Linghu Chong. But

he was slightly afraid of Yue Buqun so he didn't dare to draw his sword to kill him inside the Fortune Prestige Escort House. Hence, he wanted to lead Linghu Chong out of the escort house first before making his move.

This was just what Linghu Chong wanted. Before he went out, he shouted, "Mr. Yue, from now on you must protect yourself better. Devil Sect's Chief Ren Woxing has reappeared. This person can absorb other people's internal energy by using his Art of Essence Absorbing. He said that he wanted to give some trouble to the Huashan School. There's also the matter of Songshan School wanting to swallow up Huashan School. You're an honourable man while other people are heartless and cruel so you must protect yourself." He came to Fuzhou because he wanted to tell his Master these words. After he finished speaking, he took large steps and went out of the house. Zhong Zhen and his martial brothers followed him out.

Just as Linghu Chong was stepping out of the escort house, he saw a group of nuns and women standing outside the main door. They were the female disciples from Heng-Shan School. Yihe and Zheng E were walking in front of the group holding a visit box<sup>19</sup>.

It seemed that they had just arrived to pay a visit to Yue Buqun and Madam Yue. Linghu Chong was startled and he hastily turned his head around not wanting to meet them but Yihe and the other disciples had already seen him. But it was good that Yilin was right at the back of the group and didn't manage to see his appearance.

As soon as Zhong Zhen and his two martial brothers stepped out of the door, Yihe and Zheng E recognised them. Startled, they stopped where they were. Linghu Chong thought, "Heng-Shan School's disciples already know that my Master is here so they came here to visit. There's my Master and Master-Wife to tend to them here so they won't suffer a loss." He didn't want to meet Yilin so he slipped away to the side wanting to get away.



Simultaneously, Zhong Zhen, Deng Bagong, and Gao Kexin drew their swords out and jumped in front of him and shouted, "You want to run away?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "I don't have any weapon. How do I fight?"

At this time, Yue Buqun, Madam Yue and the rest of the Huashan School's disciples had arrived at the door wanting to see how Linghu Chong would cope with Zhong Zhen and his two martial brothers. Yue Lingshan pulled her sword out of the scabbard and shouted, "Big..." intending to toss the sword to him. But Yue Buqun extended his left hand and used two fingers to hit the top of her sword shaking it. Yue Lingshan pleaded, "Dad!" But Yue Buqun just shook his head. Linghu Chong had turned around and saw all this and he was reassured, "Little martial sister still care for me like in the old days." Suddenly, a few people shouted in surprise.

Linghu Chong knew that someone must have started a sneak attack. There wasn't enough time to turn his head around so he immediately jumped forward. His internal energy was very deep, so his jump was very high and fast which enabled him to escape from that attack. But he still heard the sound of the wind at the back of his head as a sword was slashed down close to the back of his body. If he had jumped a fraction of a second later or not used enough energy, he would have been half a foot closer and his body would have been split in two. He had luckily escaped from a very dangerous situation.

Linghu Chong immediately turned his head around as soon as he landed. He heard someone yelling and saw moving white lights. It was the Heng-Shan School's female disciples joining the fight. They had divided into three groups of seven people each. Each of the group separately surrounded one person. This instance of pulling out the swords, moving, surrounding, fighting and movement of the swords were done extremely fast especially when aided with their qinggong. Their movements were also beautiful. It was

obvious that they had practised this type of fighting formation. Each of their swords was pointed at the enemy's head, throat, chest, stomach, waist, back, and side. These seven places on their bodies were threatened simultaneously. Once the formation was completed, the seven disciples all stopped moving.

It was Zhong Zhen who sneakily attacked Linghu Chong just then. After hearing Linghu Chong's harmful speech towards Songshan School, he tried to take advantage of Linghu Chong's unpreparedness and tried to kill him. He wanted to get rid of a potential informant in order to prevent him from saying more which might increase Yue Buqun's suspicion. Even though he executed an extremely deadly move, his opponent still managed to escape. And now the Heng-Shan School's disciples had finished their formation. Although his martial art was high, he couldn't move at all. If he even moved a muscle then a sword would pierce into his body.

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue didn't know that Heng-Shan School and Zhong Zhen's party had met before in Nianbapu town. They were greatly surprised when both parties started to fight each other. The fighting formation of the Heng-Shan School's disciples looked wonderful once it was completed. Twenty-one people were divided into three groups and their twenty-one swords trembled slightly as cold lights flickered around the area. Besides their sleeves floating in the air, everything else was totally still but there were unbounded murderous opportunities in their formation.

When Linghu Chong turned around to protect himself, he saw how Heng-Shan School started and completed their fighting formations with seven swords attacking and surrounding each enemy. He did not find any flaw at all in the formation, as if it had been executed with "No move to break a move" sword intention from Dugu Nine Swords. He cheered out loud, "Wonderful! What a splendid sword formation!"

Seeing that he had been completely restrained, Zhong Zhen suddenly laughed, dropped his sword and offered, "Everyone is on the same side. What kind of joke are we playing here? I admit defeat, ok?" Yihe was leading the group surrounding him. When she saw that the enemy admitted defeat and dropped his sword, she withdrew her sword. The remaining six people also withdrew their swords. To their surprise, Zhong Zhen used his left foot to kick his long sword up and hit its handle with his hand to shoot the sword forward. As the sword pierced Yihe's right arm, she uttered an "ah" and dropped her sword.

Zhong Zhen laughed as he moved like lightning injuring Heng-Shan School's disciples one by one. In the ensuing confusion, the other fourteen disciples in the other two formations were distracted. Deng Bagong and Gao Kexin simultaneously took advantage of this to launch their attacks. Immediately, there were sounds of swords clashing. Linghu Chong grabbed Yihe's sword from the ground and struck out. There were sounds of "qiang lang", "ah", "hey", and many others as he hit the back of Gao Kexin's hand causing him drop his sword, made Deng Bagong's soft whip turn over and wrap around his own neck, and struck Zhong Zhen's hand forcing him to retreat a few steps. But Zhong Zhen still managed to feebly hold on to his trembling sword with a weakened hand.

Two girls sharply called out; one shouted, "General Wu!" while the other cried, "Big brother Linghu!" Zheng E was the one who called out "General Wu!" The way Linghu Chong made these three people retreat with his sword art was identical to the sword art used to defeat these three people in Nianbapu's inn. Gao Kexin was at a loss, Deng Bagong was choking while Zhong Zhen was startled and angry at the same time. Zheng E had a sharp mind and she had previously seen Linghu Chong used this move. Although his appearance and clothes were now completely different, she

still managed to recognise him immediately from his sword move.

The other person who called out, "Big brother Linghu!" was of course Yilin. She was in the group with Yizhen and Yizhi surrounding Deng Bagong. While they were in formation, everyone was concentrating completely and their eyes were observing the enemy closely. With their eyes so focused, they only saw the point that each was aiming at. The person aiming at the head was only looking at the head and the person aiming at the chest was only looking at the chest. They didn't look at any other parts of the enemy's body. So naturally, they didn't even see the person next to them. Only when the formation was scattered, she was able to see Linghu Chong.

Yilin had not seen him for more than a year when he suddenly appeared in front of her. Yilin's whole body shook and she was feeling giddy. Now that he had been recognized, Linghu Chong realized that he wouldn't be able to conceal his identity anymore. He laughed and chided, "Your granny, you three chaps don't know about good and evil. Heng-Shan School's Shi Tai already spared you a life but you unexpectedly return their kindness with enmity. General isn't pleased in seeing this at all. I... I... " Suddenly, he felt dazed, his vision darkened and with his legs giving out, he fell down on the ground heavily.

Yilin rushed forward quickly to support him and worriedly called out, "Big brother Linghu, big brother Linghu!" She then saw his right shoulder and arm were bleeding profusely. She took out her school's "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder" medicine pill from her sleeve and fed it to him. Zheng E and Yizhen also took out their school's "Heavenly Connecting Glue" and applied it to his wounds. Each of the Heng-Shan School's disciples was grateful to him for helping them. If he hadn't helped them that day, each of them would have lost her life. Not only would they have died miserably, they might also have been insulted by those evildoers.

Heng-Shan disciples busied themselves applying medicines, wiping blood and wrapping the wounds up. They were doing all these tasks with all their hearts. When any female in the world has met with this kind of urgent situation, they would start talking incessantly. Even though Heng-Shan School disciples were warriors of Wulin, they weren't exempt from this female trait. They were all talking at once as they surrounded Linghu Chong. Some were sighing, some were showing concern, some were asking who hurt my General, and some were saying that the attacker was vicious and heartless. They were all talking about different things while some were also reciting "Amituofu". Huashan School's people were quite surprised when they saw this scene unfolding in front of them.

Yue Buqun thought to himself, "Heng-Shan School's disciples are highly disciplined. Why are these female disciples acting in this way? They're actually fussing over this loafer Linghu Chong and staring at him, not even observing the proper distance between man and woman. They're also calling him big brother and general. When has this young thief become a general? They're really ignorant and have become muddleheaded. How come there is no Heng-Shan School elder in charge of them?"

Zhong Zhen made a hand signal to his two martial brothers and they immediately pointed their weapons and rushed at Linghu Chong. They knew that if this person were not eliminated, they would have endless trouble in the future. Moreover, they had lost twice under his sword. This was a good opportunity to get rid of this person while he was still unconscious.

Yihe whistled and fourteen female disciples immediately formed a row dancing their swords about and blocked Zhong Zhen and his two brothers. Each of these female disciples' martial art wasn't high but when they were fighting in formation, they were like four or five first class masters. Originally, Yue Buqun wanted to mediate between these two

sides, but he couldn't anticipate how all these incidents had unfolded. He also didn't know how the two sides had developed this enmity. In addition, he disliked both the Songshan and Heng-Shan Schools. So he thought he should just watch for the moment and wait patiently for things to change. He saw the Heng-Shan School's disciples were defending very tightly. Zhong Zhen was attacking continuously but he wasn't able to get near at all. Kao Gexin came up with an idea. He feigned an attack towards the front person but instead slashed towards Yiqing's thigh. Suddenly injured and seeping blood, Yiqing was distressed even though her injury wasn't heavy.

From his dazed state, Linghu Chong heard the sounds of swords clashing continuously. He opened his eyes to have a look and saw Yilin's anxious face. She was praying, "All living things are distressed. There is immeasurable bitterness all over the body. Guan Yin with her divine intelligence can offer salvation from this bitterness..." He felt very thankful for Yilin's prayer. As he struggled to stand up, he whispered, "Thank you, little martial sister. Hand me a sword."

"You... you... don't... don't..." Yilin pleaded.

Linghu Chong returned a slight smile as she gave her sword to him. He held onto her shoulder with his left hand to stand up and then staggered and swayed as he walked forward. Yilin was still anxious about his injury but when she felt that she was supporting his weight on her shoulder, she felt more courageous. She then transferred her whole body's energy to her right shoulder. Linghu Chong passed by several female disciples to get in front. With the first strike of his sword, Gao Kexin dropped his sword. With the second strike, Deng Bagong's soft whip wrapped around his neck. The third strike hit the top of Zhong Zhen's sword. Zhong Zhen knew that Linghu Chong's sword art was strangely magical and that he was definitely not his match. But he saw him standing unsteadily. So he relied on his internal energy to hit Linghu Chong's sword out of his hand. As the two swords

clashed, he immediately transferred his internal energy into his sword. Suddenly, he felt his internal energy started to flow out swiftly and unexpectedly he couldn't stop it. It was because Linghu Chong's Art of Essence Absorbing had become unwittingly deep. It didn't need contact between skins anymore. As long as the opponent used his internal energy to attack then he would be able to absorb the internal energy through the sword.

Zhong Zhen was alarmed and quickly withdrew his sword. He then thrust his sword out again. Linghu Chong saw the lower part of the side of his body was wide open and wanted to take advantage of this and kill him. But his arm felt weak and he couldn't do what he wanted to do. So he was only able to block the sword. When the swords clashed again, Zhong Zhen's internal energy flowed out once more and his heart rate increased. He was frightened and angry at the same time but he withdrew his sword again. He then gathered his strength to thrust the long sword forward. Midway through the stroke, the sword changed direction sharply and was now aiming at Yilin's chest. This move was both false and true at the same time. It had many variations and was extremely fierce. If Linghu Chong moved to save Yilin then Zhong Zhen would pierce Linghu Chong's lower abdomen. If Linghu Chong didn't move to save Yilin then this sword would really pierce Yilin. Also, he wanted to confuse Linghu Chong so that an opportunity to kill him would arise. Everyone was calling out in alarm when they saw the point of the sword had already reached Yilin's gown. Linghu Chong's long sword suddenly crossed over and hit the top of Zhong Zhen's sword.

Zhong Zhen's long sword instantly stopped in the middle of the air glued to Linghu Chong's sword. Zhong Zhen used more strength to push his sword forward but unexpectedly it didn't even move the slightest bit. His sword slowly bent upwards and at the same time, his internal energy started to flow out. Summing up the situation really quickly, he hastily

withdrew his sword and jumped backwards. However, he had lost a lot of internal energy previously and had not time to gather more energy yet. As his body was in mid air, he suddenly felt paralysed and landed heavily. This landing looked very awkward and it was as if it was done by an ordinary person without any martial arts. Supported by his two hands on the ground, Zhong Zhen slowly struggled to get up but only managed to get up halfway before he tottered to one side and fell to the ground again.

Deng Bagong and Gao Kexin rushed over to help him stand up. They both asked, "Martial brother, what's wrong?"

Zhong Zhen was staring at Linghu Chong's face. His thought turned back to more than ten years ago when Devil Sect's Chief Ren Woxing shook the entire Wulin world. But Ren Woxing couldn't be this twenty something years old youth. He stammered, "You're Ren Woxing's disc... disciple. You know the Art... Art of Essence Absorbing!"

Gao Kexin was alarmed, "Martial brother, did he absorb your internal energy?"

"Yes," answered Zhong Zhen. But he was now standing steadily and he felt his internal energy gradually increasing. It was because Linghu Chong's cultivation of the Art of Essence Absorbing was not that profound yet. Also, he didn't intentionally absorb Zhong Zhen's internal energy. It was just that Zhong Zhen fell awkwardly because he felt his internal energy flowing out and was scared to death.

Deng Bagong whispered, "Let's get out of here. We'll come back here later." Zhong Zhen waved his hands and said to Linghu Chong in a loud voice, "Devil Sect's demon, you're using such an evil method. From now on, you are the enemy of all of the heroes in this world. Today, I'm not your match, but our orthodox schools would never surrender to the disgusting power of your evil method."

He then turned around, gave Yue Buqun a bow and inquired, "Mr. Yue, you have no relationship with this Devil Sect's demon, correct?"



Yue Buqun just uttered an "Hng" but did not answer.

Zhong Zhen didn't dare to be unruly in front of him so he said, "The real situation would eventually be revealed. We'll meet again." He then walked away with his two martial brothers.

Yue Buqun went down the entrance stairs and agitatedly said, "Linghu Chong, you're good. So, you've learned Ren Woxing's Art of Essence Absorbing."

Although Linghu Chong had learned Ren Woxing's martial art accidentally, the fact was he had learned it. So he couldn't dispute it at all. Yue Buqun fiercely asked, "I ask you, is this true?"

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered.

Yue Buqun viciously declared, "You've practised this evil method. So you're the enemy of all the orthodox schools. Today, you're carrying an injury so I won't take advantage of you. When we meet again, if I don't kill you then it means that you've killed me." He turned sideways and addressed the Huashan School's disciples, "This person is your mortal enemy. Whoever still has any feeling towards him like he was your martial brother, then remove yourself from this school. All of you understand this?"

All the disciples answered together, "Yes!"

Yue Buqun saw his daughter looking like she had something to say. He said, "Shan'er, even though you're my daughter, I won't make an exception. Do you understand?"

Yue Lingshan answered in a small voice, "I understand."

Linghu Chong was already weak from his injuries but when he heard these words, he suddenly felt both his knees powerless. He dropped his sword and slowly slumped down.

Yihe, who was standing on his right, extended her hand to support him. She ventured, "Martial uncle Yue, there must have been a misunderstanding. It's just too crude to sever your relationship like this when you haven't investigated this matter yet."

Yue Buqun demanded, "What misunderstanding?"

Yihe answered, "My Heng-Shan School's disciples were recently accosted by the Devil Sect's demons. At every battle, this Linghu General Wu helped us in fighting them. If he was a Devil Sect's person, why would he help us in fighting them off and make himself an enemy of the Devil Sect?"

Yihe had heard Yilin called him "Big Brother Linghu" while Yue Buqun had called him "Linghu Chong"; but she knew him as "General Wu". So she decided to just call him with both names.

Yue Buqun said, "Devil Sect's demons are very crafty. Don't believe his act. Which Shi Tai is leading your school's group in coming to the south?"

He believed that these young nuns and ladies had been affected by Linghu Chong's fancy speech and only an experienced senior Shi Tai would be able to see through his ruse.

Yihe mournfully answered, "Martial uncle Dingjing Shi Tai was unfortunately killed by the Devil Sect's demons en route."

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue were both alarmed. Right at that moment, a middle-aged nun came towards the Heng-Shan School's disciples. She stopped in front of Yihe and said, "A letter has arrived from the White Cloud Temple's pigeon", as she offered her a small bamboo tube with both hands. Yihe took the tube, opened its plug, took out the small rolled up cloth from inside the tube and rolled it open. After reading it, she exclaimed, "Ai yo, this is not good!" When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard that a letter had arrived from the White Cloud Temple, they all crowded around Yihe. When they saw Yihe was frightened, they hastily asked, "What?" "What's on Master's letter?" "What's not good?" Yihe gave the letter to Yiqing saying, "Martial sister, have a look." Yiqing took the letter and read it out aloud, "Dingyi Shi Tai and I are besieged by enemies in the Dragon Spring Sword-

forging Valley<sup>20</sup>." She then questioned, "This is Abbess'... blood letter<sup>21</sup>. How come they are at Dragon Spring?"

"Let's go!" Yizhen rallied.

"But we don't know who the enemy is?" Yiqing reasoned.

Yihe said, "They're already in an ominous situation, let's hurry up and catch up to them. If we have to die, then we'll die together with Master."

Yiqing thought, "Master and martial uncle's martial arts are levels above us but the enemies still managed to besiege them. If we go there, it's most likely that we won't be able to offer them any aid." She took the blood letter, went in front of Yue Buqun, bowed to him and requested, "Martial uncle Yue, our Abbess sent us a letter, it said: '...besieged in Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley.' Martial uncle, considering the friendship among the Five Mountains Sword Schools, please think of a way to save them." Yue Buqun took the letter and read it. He questioned, "How come Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai are in Zhejiang? The two of them have outstanding martial arts. How did the enemies manage to besiege them? This is really strange. Is this Abbess' writing on the letter?"

"It's my Master's writing. I'm afraid they must have been injured already that they hastily used their blood to write the letter," Yiqing assuredly answered.

"You don't know who the enemy is?" Yue Buqun asked.

"It's probably the Devil Sect's people. Other than them, our school has no other enemy," Yiqing said.

Yue Buqun looked at Linghu Chong from the corner of his eyes and slowly said, "Maybe it's a false letter from a Devil Sect's demon to entice you into a trap. We must be wary of their deceptions."

"This matter is most urgent as Abbess had surely met with a disaster. So the most important thing for us is to go and save them. Martial sister Yiqing, let's go quickly and catch up to them. Martial uncle Yue has no time so it's

useless to ask for his help any further," Yihe shouted in a clear voice.

"Right. If we arrive too late, we will regret this for eternity," Yizhen said agreeing with Yihe.

When Heng-Shan School's disciples saw that Yue Buqun had flatly refused their request regardless of its upright intentions, they were all angered.

"Big brother Linghu, you stay at Fuzhou to tend to your wounds. We'll go and save Master and Martial uncle first. Then we'll come back to look for you here," Yilin said.

"Fearless thieves are harming people again. How can this General just sit back and watch? Everybody, let's go and save them," Linghu Chong responded in a loud voice.

"Your injuries are serious. How can you hurry along?" Yilin said.

"This General is ready to give his body to his country and die in the battlefield. I'm going to use my feet to get there. Go, go, hurry up and go!" Linghu Chong said.

Heng-Shan School's disciples were doubtful that they would be able to save their Abbess from danger. But when Linghu Chong said he was going to come with them, their spirits lifted and all their faces were filled with joy. Yizhen said, "In that case, many thanks. We'll look for a horse for you to ride."

"Everybody rides! How can you not get a horse if you want to fight later? Go, go," Linghu Chong said loudly. Seeing how his Master had harshly severed their relationship earlier, he was feeling bitter and a bit insane.

Yiqing bowed to Yue Buqun and Madam Yue, "We take our leave from seniors."

Yihe cried out in fury, "Why do you need to be polite to this sort of person? You're wasting time. Hng, their reputations have no merit and they have no sense of righteousness."

"Martial sister, say no more!" Yiqing reproached in a loud voice.

Yue Buqun was laughing and didn't pay attention to what was said.

But Lao Denuo rushed out and shouted, "Watch what your filthy mouth is saying! Our five mountains sword schools have the same root but different branches. When one school encounters a problem, the other four are ready to save them. But you are colluding together with this Devil Sect's demon Linghu Chong and so your conduct must be crafty and evil. My master has to consider this extensively before giving his help. Why don't you kill this demon Linghu Chong first to make everything clear. Otherwise, my Huashan School cannot collaborate with your Heng-Shan School and follow your bad example."

Yihe was indignant when she heard this. She took a big step forward and put her hand on her sword handle. She demanded, "What do you mean 'follow our bad example'?"

"You are colluding with the Devil Sect. That's what's called to follow their bad example," Lao Denuo said.

Yihe was affronted and she declared, "Hero Linghu is brave and righteous. He helps people in trouble. That's what you call a real hero, a gentleman. But your type of people, who call yourself a hero but run away from danger and when you see death, you still don't help. That's what you call a hypocrite!"

Yue Buqun's nickname was "Gentleman Sword" and what Huashan School's people hate the most was being called a "hypocrite"<sup>22</sup>. When Lao Denuo heard her ridiculing his Master, he pulled his sword out and thrust it towards Yihe's throat. He was using Huashan School's clever move "Graceful Phoenix". Yihe didn't anticipate that he would suddenly pick a fight so she didn't have time to block the move. She was startled as the sword reached her throat. But at the same time, flickering of swords was seen and seven swords were already piercing towards Lao Denuo. Lao Denuo hastily pulled his sword back but this enabled a sword to reach his chest. Sounds of "chi, chi" were heard as the other six swords

also slashed his clothes, each making a rip of about a foot long. It was only because Heng-Shan School's disciples didn't want to take his life that they stopped as their swords reached his skin. But Zheng E's martial art was still shallow so she didn't manage to control the power of her sword properly. Once she had ripped his right sleeve, the point of her sword continued forward and slashed his skin. Lao Denuo frighteningly jumped backwards in a hurry. Just then, a book fell out of his bosom.

The sun was shining brightly. Everyone saw clearly the words "Violet Twilight Secret Manual" written on the book. Lao Denuo's expression changed greatly and he tried to snatch the book back. Linghu Chong shouted, "Stop him!"

Yihe already had a sword in her hand and she quickly made three slashes. Lao Denuo lifted his sword to trade moves but he couldn't advance a single step.

"Dad, how come second martial brother has the secret manual?" Yue Lingshan cried.

"Lao Denuo, you killed sixth martial brother, didn't you?" Linghu Chong asked in a loud voice.

That day when sixth martial brother was killed, the "Violet Twilight Secret Manual" also went missing. He had been blamed for both incidents since then on. But today, it was really unexpected that after Lao Denuo's waist band was cut by Heng-Shan School's disciples, Huashan School's treasured scripture would fall out from his pocket.

"Nonsense!" Lao Denuo shouted.

As he said this, he lowered his body and charged towards a small alley. Linghu Chong was fuming as he gave chase. But he only managed to run a few steps before he swayed and fell down. Yilin and Zheng E quickly rushed to his side to support him while Yue Lingshan picked the book up and gave it to her father. "Dad, it was second martial brother who stole the book." Yue Buqun's expression was pale as he looked at the book and ascertained that it was the internal energy secret manual that had been passed down from the previous

Huashan School's leader. Luckily, the book was still intact and undamaged. He then bitterly said, "It was you who wasn't good, taking the book because of your feelings."

Yihe didn't want to let them off that easily so she said in a loud voice, "That's what you called to follow your bad example."

Yu Sao walked in front of Linghu Chong and asked, "Hero Linghu, how do you feel?"

Linghu Chong gritted his teeth, "My martial brother was killed by that thief. It's a pity I can't chase him."

He saw Yue Buqun turned around and entered the escort house followed by his disciples. They then shut the escort house's main door. He thought, "Master's first disciple has learned the Devil Sect's evil martial art. His second disciple killed a martial brother in the same school and stole the school's secret manual. No wonder he's outraged!" He then said, "Abbess is being besieged so we can't delay any longer. Our most urgent matter is to quickly go and save them. Sooner or later, that thief Lao Denuo would fall under my hand."

Yu Sao said, "You're currently injured, so... so... ai, I can't say..."

She was previously a servant. But at this time, her position in Heng-Shan School wasn't low and her martial art was not weak, but her knowledge was limited. So she didn't know how to express her appreciation towards him. Linghu Chong said, "Let's go quickly to the horse market and buy some horses."

He took out the gold and silver taels out of his bosom and gave them to Yu Sao. But there weren't enough horses on the market, so the lighter female disciples had to ride double. They rode out quickly towards the north from Fuzhou. After going for more than ten li, they saw more than ten horses grazing on a field guarded by about six or seven soldiers. So these horses must belong to the military.

"Get those horses." Linghu Chong said.

"Those are military horses. I'm afraid it's not appropriate," Yu Sao hastily replied.

"Saving people is most important. Even if it's the emperor's horse, we'll still take it. What do we care about appropriate or not appropriate?" Linghu Chong argued.

"It's a crime against the government authorities, I'm afraid..." Yiqing said.

"Is saving your Master more important or obeying the law more important? What his granny government authorities? General Wu is a government authority. If General wants horses, those little soldiers won't dare to deny him!" Linghu Chong reasoned.

"Yes!" complied Yihe.

"Knock those soldiers down and get their horses," Linghu Chong cried out.

"Twelve horses are enough," Yiqing said.

But Linghu Chong roared, "Get them all."

He had an air of authority about him as he roared out his commands. Ever since Dingjing Shi Tai passed away, the Heng-Shan School's disciples had been mournful, frightened, and were at a loss about what to do. But when they heard Linghu Chong vigorously shouting his command, they urged their horses to charge forward, knocked down the soldiers guarding the horses, and seized all the horses. Those soldiers had never seen outlaw nuns before, so as they were knocked down to the ground and unable to move, they shouted, "What are you doing?" "What kind of joke is this?"

After they had taken the horses, all the disciples were excited. They were all giggling and talking non-stop. They all wanted to get on the fresh horses so they jumped onto the military horses. At noon, they arrived at Nianbapu town. When the townspeople saw a group of nuns leading an army of horses with a male in their group, they were greatly surprised.

When they finished eating their meals, Yiqing counted the money they had and whispered, "Brother Linghu, we



don't have enough money." At the horse market, because everyone was thinking about their Master, they weren't in the mood to haggle. All their monies were used up to buy the horses and now they only had coppers left.

"Martial sister Zheng, take Yu Sao to the horse market and sell a horse. But don't sell any of the military horses," Linghu Chong said.

Zheng E complied leading the horse and Yu Sao to the horse market. The other disciples covered their mouths and giggled as they were all thinking, "Yu Sao is finished and Zheng E is such a delicate little lady, it would be a rare sight at the horse market."

But Zheng E was intelligent, clever, and good in speaking. She had only been in Fujian for a few days and she already managed to speak a few hundreds words of the difficult Fujian's dialect. Not long after, she had sold the horse and brought some money back to pay their bills.

When night fell, they were able to see a big town far away with houses scattered like the stars. There were at least around seven to eight hundred houses in the town. When they reached there, they ate their dinner and used the money from selling the horse to pay for the bill. Not much of the money was left afterwards. Zheng E was excited and laughed, "Tomorrow, we have to sell another horse." Linghu Chong whispered, "Go to the street and ask around who the richest person in this town is and also who among the richest is also the meanest or worst."

Zheng E nodded and pulled Qin Juan to come with her. Not long after, they came back, "This town has one very rich person. His surname is White. His nickname is White Peeling Leather. He has a pawnshop and also a rice shop. With a nickname like White Peeling Leather<sup>23</sup>, I don't think he's a good person."

Linghu Chong laughed, "Tonight, we'll go and ask him for alms."

Zheng E said, "These type of people are very stingy; I'm afraid we won't get any alms from him."

Linghu Chong smiled slightly but didn't say a word. After a while, he said, "Everybody, let's go."

Everyone saw that the sky was dark already. But Master was in trouble so they were resigned to continue traveling during the night to save them. They went north from the city, but after a few li, Linghu Chong called out, "Ok, we'll stay here to rest for the night." Everyone stayed besides a creek to have a rest. Linghu Chong also closed his eyes to have a rest. After about an hour, Linghu Chong opened his eyes and said to Yu Sao and Yihe, "Each of you bring six martial sisters and go to White Peeling Leather's house to ask for alms. Martial sister Zheng, you lead the way." Yu Sao and Yihe both thought that it was strange but they still complied with his order.

Linghu Chong went on, "Get at least five hundred silver taels, but it'd be best to get two thousand silver taels." Yihe was surprised, "A yo, how can we ask for that much?" Linghu Chong said, "Two thousand silver taels is so small, this General wouldn't even take a look at it. If we get two thousand taels, we keep one thousand taels to use ourselves and give the other thousand to the poor townspeople." They suddenly understood what he meant and they looked at each other.

"You... you want us to plunder the rich and then give it to the poor?" Yihe said.

"It's not plundering. We're getting alms from the rich to aid the poor. We only have a few people here, even if we gather all of our money, we'd probably only get around two silvers. If we don't ask the rich to give us poor common people some money then how do we get to Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley?" Linghu Chong said.

When everyone heard the word "Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley", they all changed their minds and said, "Let's get alms!"

"You're inexperienced at getting this kind of alms, so I'm afraid you won't be getting any money. The method is slightly different. Cover all your faces with handkerchiefs. And when you ask for alms from White Peeling Leather, you don't need to say anything. When you see the gold and silver, just take them," Linghu Chong said.

Zheng E giggled, "And if he's not giving them?"

"Then that's unappreciative of him. Heng-Shan School's heroes are different from Wulin's other small warriors. Even if other people would send sedan chairs to ask you to visit, you still wouldn't pay them a visit. How can they ask you to come that easily? White Peeling Leather is just a small town boss. What kind of position does he have in Wulin? If he unexpectedly gets a visit from fifteen honourable masters from Heng-Shan School, isn't this giving him a lot of face already? If after seeing you, he still doesn't want to give you alms, then you might as well trade some moves with him. See if White Peeling Leather's martial art is better or martial sister Zheng's fists and kicks are better?" Linghu Chong answered. Some of the disciples laughed as they heard him talking like this.

There were a few people who were more experienced like Yiqing and they secretly thought that this was inappropriate. Heng-Shan School's rules were very strict. They warn against stealing and plundering. This kind of getting alms definitely violated those rules. But Yihe and Zheng E were already hastily walking away so those people who disagreed with this idea didn't manage to say anything more.

When Linghu Chong turned his head around, he saw Yilin's beautiful eyes were watching him attentively. He smiled, "Little martial sister, you think it's not right?"

Yilin avoided his eyes as she replied softly, "I don't know. Whatever you said we should do, I... I think they're always not wrong."

"That day when I wanted to eat a watermelon, didn't you go to the field and take a watermelon for me?"

Yilin's face turned red as she thought of the time she spent together with him in that wild plain. Right at that moment, they suddenly saw shooting stars falling across the night sky leaving long beautiful trails. Linghu Chong queried, "Do you remember what you wished for?"

Yilin replied softly, "I remember", as she turned her head around. She then continued, "Big brother Linghu, this kind of wish is very effective."

"Really? What did you wish for?"

But Yilin just lowered her head and did not reply. In her heart, she was thinking, "I've wished for several hundreds several thousands times to be able to see you again. Finally, my wish came true and I was able to see you again."

Suddenly, they heard the sound of a horse's gallop from far away. A person on horseback was coming from the south towards them from the same road that Yu Sao, Yihe and the other disciples used to go away just then. But Yu Sao's group went without their horses. Who could it be? Everyone stood up and was looking towards the sound of the horse's gallop. Then they heard a female calling out, "Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong!"

Linghu Chong's heart trembled as he recognized Yue Lingshan's voice. He called out, "Little martial sister, I'm here!" Yilin's body shook and her face turned pale. She then retreated a step.

In the dark, a white horse came towards them. When it was still tens of feet away from them, Yue Lingshan stood up and suddenly pulled back on the rein stopping the horse and making it neigh. When Linghu Chong saw her riding hastily, he felt that something wasn't right. He called out, "Martial sister, are Master and Master-Wife alright?"

Yue Lingshan was still on the horse, her face illuminated by the moonlight. He saw her looking pale as he heard her saying, "Who's your Master, Master-Wife? Why do you have to concern about my dad and mum?"

Linghu Chong felt as if someone had punched his chest and his body swayed. Before, it was only Yue Buqun who was acting severely towards him but Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan were still treating him like in the old times and didn't embarrass him. But now hearing Yue Lingshan talking to him in this manner, he couldn't help but feel sad. "Yes, I've already been expelled from Huashan School and don't have the good fortune of calling them Master and Master-Wife anymore."

"You already know you can't call them that anymore, why did you still call them that just now?" Yue Lingshan scolded. Linghu Chong could only hang his head down and felt as if his heart had been stabbed by a knife.

Yue Lingshan uttered an "Hng" as she rode the horse forward a few steps. She demanded, "Give it to me!" as she extended her right hand forward.

Linghu Chong answered despondently, "What?"

"Even now, you're still pretending. Do you think you can conceal it from me?" She suddenly shouted louder, "Give it to me!"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I don't understand. What do you want?"

"What do I want? I want the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual!"

"Evil Resisting Sword Manual? Why are you asking me?" Linghu Chong was baffled.

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "If I don't ask you, then who do I ask? Who took that Buddhist robe from Lin family's old house?"

"Those two chaps from Songshan School, "White Hair Immortal" Bu Chen and "Bald Eagle" Sha Tianjiang."

"Who killed these two chaps, Bu and Sha?"

"I did," Linghu Chong answered.

"And that Buddhist robe, who took it?"

"I did."

"Then give it to me!" Yue Lingshan demanded.

"I was injured at the time and passed out after getting to the old house. Then... then your mother saved me. When I came to, the Buddhist robe wasn't with me anymore," Linghu Chong said.

Yue Lingshan looked up and laughed, but there wasn't a hint of real laughter in her voice. She said, "So according to you, my mum embezzled the manual? What contemptible and shameless words that are coming out of your mouth!"

"I didn't mean that your mother embezzled it. Gods above and inside my heart, I didn't mean to disrespect your mother in the slightest bit. I only said... only said..." Linghu Chong stammered.

"What?" Yue Lingshan shouted.

"Your mother must have seen this Buddhist robe and realised that it belonged to the Lin family so she must have given it to martial brother Lin," Linghu Chong reasoned.

Yue Lingshan coldly said, "Why would my mum search you? You disregarded your own life to snatch that thing back to supposedly return to martial brother Lin. Hng, hng, couldn't you have returned it when you woke up? Why wouldn't she have given you face over this matter?"

Linghu Chong thought, "What she said is true. Then someone had stolen that Buddhist robe?"

As he pondered about this, cold sweat started to pour out from his back. "If it's like that then there must be some other reason."

He then shook his clothes all over. "I don't have the Buddhist robe on me. If you don't believe me, you can search me."

Yue Lingshan replied in a coldly, "You're a very clever person. Why would you keep it on yourself after taking other people's stuff? Also, you have so many shady nuns and monks with you here. One of them could've kept it for you."

Yue Lingshan was treating Linghu Chong like she was examining a prisoner; all the Heng-Shan School's disciples already thought that this was unfair. When they heard her

insulting them, a few of them cried out at the same time, "Nonsense!" "What shady nuns!" "There are no monks here!" "Aren't you shady yourself?"

Yue Lingshan grabbed her sword handle and shouted, "You're all Buddhist disciples but you're entangled with this man and followed him day and night. Can't this be called shady? Pei! Shameless!"

Heng-Shan School's disciples were outraged. Seven or eight of them immediately pulled their swords out. Yue Lingshan also drew her sword out and shouted, "You want to rely on numbers to win and shut me up? Come on! If Lady Yue is afraid of you people then I wouldn't be a Huashan School's disciple!"

Linghu Chong waved his left hand stopping the Heng-Shan School's disciples from attacking. He sighed, "You've already suspected me from the beginning so I don't have anything to say to that. How about Lao Denuo? How come you didn't go and ask him? He already stole the "Violet Twilight Secret Manual". Maybe he also stole this Buddhist robe?"

"You want me to ask Lao Denuo, don't you?" Yue Lingshan replied loudly.

Linghu Chong thought that her question was strange but he still answered, "Yes!"

"Ok. Then come here and take my life! You're already proficient in Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art, so I'm not your match at all!" Yue Lingshan shouted.

"Why would I... I want to injure you?" Linghu Chong confusedly said.

"You wanted me to ask Lao Denuo. If you don't kill me then how do I meet him in this world?" Yue Lingshan said.

Linghu Chong felt happy and surprised when he heard this. He asked, "Lao Denuo, Mast... your father killed him?" He knew that after he was expelled from Huashan School, Lao Denuo's martial art would be the highest among the disciples. If Yue Buqun didn't kill Lao Denuo himself then

other people might not be able to do away with him. Linghu Chong hated Lao Denuo to the bone as he had killed Lu Dayou. So when he heard that Lao Denuo had died already, it was a joyful occasion.

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "When a gentleman does something, he takes responsibility for it. You've killed Lao Denuo, why do you still not admit to it?"

Linghu Chong was totally puzzled, "You said I killed him? If I had really killed him, why wouldn't I admit to it? This person had killed sixth martial brother and deserved to be killed. My only regret is that I couldn't do it with my own hands."

"Then why did you also kill eighth martial brother? He didn't offend you at all, you... you're so cruel," Yue Lingshan said in a loud voice.

Linghu Chong was even more startled. His voice was trembling, "Eighth martial brother and I are good to each other. Why... why would I want to kill him?"

"Ever since you colluded with the Devil Sect, your behaviour has been really strange. Who knows why... why you want to kill eighth martial brother? You... you..." Her tears started to flow as she said this.

Linghu Chong took a step forward and said, "Little martial sister, don't guess wildly. Eighth martial brother was still very young and didn't have any enmity with anyone or did anyone wrong. Not just me, even other people wouldn't have the heart to harm him."

Yue Lingshan looked outraged as she fiercely shouted, "Then why did you have the heart to kill Lin Pingzhi?"

Linghu Chong was apprehensive as he asked, "Martial brother Lin... he... he also died?"

Yue Lingshan whimpered, "He hasn't died yet, your sword didn't manage to kill him. But... but who knows whether he'll... he'll be alright."

Linghu Chong calmly asked, "He's heavily injured, is he? He would naturally know who attacked him. What did he



say?"

"Who else in this world is as crafty as you? You attacked him from behind, he... he has no eyes in the back of his head," Yue Lingshan answered.

Linghu Chong felt heartbroken and bitter. He couldn't check his anger as he pulled his long sword out, gathered his qi, pulled his arm back, drew a breath and threw the sword out. The sword flew out towards a tall tallow tree with a trunk of a few feet diameter wide. It went through the middle of the tree and severed it. Half of the tree started to shake before it crashed thunderously, throwing up stones and dust off the ground. When Yue Lingshan saw the extent of the power displayed, she pulled her horse's rein back to retreat a couple of steps. "What? So you've already learned the Devil Sect's evil method and your martial art is very good now. You want to show off in front of me?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "If I wanted to kill martial brother Lin, I didn't have to do it from his back. My strike would not have failed to kill him either."

"Who knows what kind of crafty scheme you're planning? Hng, eighth martial brother must've seen you sneaking around so you killed him to shut him up. Then you chopped his face up imagining that it was second... Lao Denuo."

Linghu Chong took a deep breath knowing that there must be some kind of secret plot going on here. He asked, "Lao Denuo's face was also chopped up?"

"Why do you ask me? How could you not know when you did it with your own hands?"

"Who else from Huashan School was injured?"

"You killed two people and injured one. That's not enough?" Yue Lingshan answered.

When Linghu Chong heard what she said, he knew that no one else had been injured and he felt relief. He thought, "Who did all these?" Suddenly, his heart felt cold as he remembered what Ren Woxing said that day at the Plum Manor. He said that if Linghu Chong didn't join the Devil Sect

then he would destroy Huashan School and slaughter everyone in it. Could it be that he had arrived in Fuzhou and already started to destroy Huashan School?

He hurriedly said, "You... you quickly go back and report to your father and mother, I'm afraid... I'm afraid it was the Devil Sect's big leader who has come to harm Huashan School."

She pursed her lips before laughing coldly, "Right, it is a big leader of the Devil Sect who has come to harm my Huashan School. Now he's a big leader of Devil Sect, but in the past, he belonged to the Huashan School. This is called to raise a tiger to sow seeds of disaster and repaying kindness with animosity."

Linghu Chong laughed bitterly and thought, "I promised to go to Dragon Spring to save Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. But my Master and Master-Wife are confronted with a big disaster. What should I do? If it was really Ren Woxing then I'm naturally not his rival. But my respected Master and Master-Wife are now facing a disaster, even if I go there to sacrifice myself, it would still be of no use. But I should be there to die together with them. In all matters, there are important ones and not important ones. And in all relationships, there are those that are close to you and those far from you. Regarding Heng-Shan School's matter, I'm forced to let them manage it by themselves first. If I'm able to stop Ren Woxing, then I'll go catch up to them at Dragon Spring to help." After he decided what to do in his heart, he said, "Ever since I left Fuzhou earlier today, I've been together with martial sisters from Heng-Shan School. How could I have divided my body to go kill eighth martial brother and Lao Denuo? You might as well ask them."

"Hng, ask them? They're already following you and have also followed your bad example. Couldn't they lie for you?"

When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard this, a few of them started shouting again. A few of the Buddhist nuns were retorting politely, while the secular disciples were

scolding really sharply. Yue Lingshan pulled the horse's rein to retreat a few steps. "Linghu Chong, little Lin has been injured heavily but even when he's in a coma, he's still concerned about the sword manual. If you still have the slightest feeling then you should return that sword manual to him. Otherwise... otherwise..."

"You really think that I'm such a contemptible and shameless person?" Linghu Chong asked.

Yue Lingshan indignantly said, "If you're not contemptible and shameless, then there's no one else in this world who is contemptible and shameless!"

Yilin heard everything that was said between them. She felt excited as she couldn't bear this anymore. "Lady Yue, Big brother Linghu treats you very well. His heart is actually very sincere towards you. Why are you scolding him so fiercely?"

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "Whether he treats me well or not, you're only a nun, what do you know?"

Yilin suddenly felt disdainful as she felt that Linghu Chong had been accused falsely. Even if she had to die a hundred times, she had to plead innocence for him. As for Buddhism's rules and regulations or how Master would blame her in the future, she put all that at the back of her mind. She immediately said clearly, "Big brother Linghu told me himself."

Yue Lingshan said, "Hng, he also talks to you about this sort of things. He... he believed that he treats me well by harming martial brother Lin?"

Linghu Chong sighed, "Martial sister Yilin, say no more. Your respectable school's "Heavenly Connecting Glue" and "White-Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pill", could you please give a bit to martial... give a bit to Lady Yue for her to take back to treat the injured?"

Yue Lingshan shook the horse's head to turn her body around. "You didn't manage to kill him, so you want to poison him now? I'm not gonna fall for your trap. Linghu Chong, if little Lin doesn't get better, I... I... " and she started weeping.

She then stroke her horsewhip urging her horse to gallop towards the south. As Linghu Chong heard the galloping of the horse gradually getting further, he felt a slight bitterness in his heart.

Qin Juan said, "This girl is so rude. It's best if her little Lin dies."

"Martial sister Qin, we are Buddhists and our hearts should be filled with mercy. Even though that lady isn't, we mustn't wish for other people's death," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong suddenly remembered, "Martial sister Yizhen, can I ask you for a favor to go for a trip?"

"Martial brother Linghu only has to say what it is. I'll do it immediately," Yizhen said.

"I don't dare. That person surnamed Lin is a martial brother from the same school. According to Lady Yue, he was heavily injured. I believe your respectable school's matchless and divine medicine..." Linghu Chong said.

"You want me to deliver the medicine to him, don't you? Alright, I'll go back to Fuzhou straight away. Martial sister Yiling, accompany me to go back there," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong clasped his hand thanking her, "Thank you two honourable martial sisters for delivering the medicine."

"Martial brother Linghu was always together with us. How could you have killed those people? I'll speak to martial uncle Yue about this injustice," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong shook his head laughing bitterly as he thought how Master had already believed that he had joined the Devil Sect. That he would stop at nothing and stop at no evil. Do they really think that Master would believe them? He thought of this as he looked at Yizhen and Yiling galloping away from them.

He considered, "They're so concerned about me. If I abandoned them and go back to Fuzhou, how can I feel comfortable? Moreover, Dingxian Shi Tai and her people are being besieged by the enemy. And I don't know whether Ren Woxing really came to Fuzhou or not..." Then he saw Qin Juan

retrieving his sword and giving it back to him. He suddenly thought, "If I wanted to kill martial brother Lin, why would I attack at his back? Also how can my sword not manage to kill him? If the person who attacked him was Ren Woxing, how could he fail to kill him with a sword? Then it must be someone else. If it's not Ren Woxing, then Master has nothing to worry about." When he thought about this, he felt slightly relieved.

He then heard the faint sound of horses galloping from somewhere far. From the sound, he gathered that there were several horses coming and thought that it must be Yu Sao and the other disciples coming back from getting alms. Sure enough, not long after, fifteen people on horseback were seen coming towards them. When they arrived in front of him, Yu Sao said, "Young hero Linghu, we... managed to get a lot of gold and silver from begging alms, but I don't know... don't know how much we got. It's in the middle of the night so we can't go and give some of these to the poor."

"Let's go to Dragon Spring now. We can delay helping the poor till later." Yihe then turned her head towards Yiqing and said, "Just then we met a young girl on the road, did you meet her? I don't know who she is, but we traded some moves."

Linghu Chong was frightened, "She fought with you?"

"Yes. This girl was rushing on a horseback. When she met us, she scolded us for being shady nuns. How shameful!"

Linghu Chong secretly felt miserable and hastily asked, "Was she heavily injured?"

Yihe was surprised, "Hey, how did you know that she was injured?"

Linghu Chong thought, "Your temperament is like a firecracker going off. If she scolded you then you'd definitely fight her. And if she had to fight fifteen of you, then how could she not get injured?" But he asked, "Where did she get injured?"

"I asked her first. Why did she scold us when we didn't even know each other? She said: "Hng, I know who you are. You're Heng-Shan School's nuns who are not following rules and customs." I said: "What not following rules and customs? Nonsense, you should clean your mouth." Then she lashed her horsewhip and didn't pay attention to me anymore. She shouted: "Make way!" So I grabbed her horsewhip and shouted, "Make way!" Then we started to fight," Yihe narrated the incident.

Yu Sao explained, "She pulled her sword out. We saw that she was from Huashan School, but it was too dark for us to look at her appearance clearly. Then I thought that she looked like Mr. Yue's daughter. I quickly told them to stop but her arm was already injured in two places. However, the injuries weren't that serious."

Yihe laughed, "I already knew who she is from the beginning. Those Huashan School's people at Fuzhou treated martial brother Linghu rudely. Also, when Heng-Shan School has a problem, they just put their hands in their sleeves and didn't care at all. So I wanted her to feel a bit of hardship."

"Martial sister Yihe showed mercy when fighting this Miss Yue. She used the move "Thread of the Golden Needle" to slash Miss Yue's left arm but she only did it lightly and only scratched her arm before she withdrew her sword. If she had used her full power, Miss Yue would have lost her arm," Zheng E added.

Linghu Chong had not calmed down yet when he felt worried again. Little martial sister was very arrogant and she wouldn't admit defeat that easily. She would have considered that tonight's fight was a big insult to her. In all likelihood, she would also blame this on him. All these things happening were fate and he couldn't do anything else. Luckily, her injuries were not serious and it shouldn't be a problem for her.

Zheng E had observed that Linghu Chong's concern towards this girl Yue was unique. She said, "If we knew earlier

that she was martial brother Linghu's martial sister, then we would just let her scold us and it would be no problem. But it was so dark so we couldn't see anything clearly. When we meet her the next time, we'll apologise to her."

Yihe angrily said, "Apologise for what? We didn't wrong her at all. It was her who scolded us as soon as she spoke to us. There's no reason to do this anywhere in the world."

Linghu Chong said, "We've already got some alms, let's go now. How did that White Peeling Leather react?"

He was feeling awful and didn't want to hear about Yue Lingshan anymore so he changed the topic. Yihe and the disciples she had taken with her started to talk about how they got the alms. They were all excited and were talking over each other. Yihe said, "Usually when we go to a rich man's place for alms, even begging for one or two taels is already difficult. But tonight, we actually wanted several thousand taels."

Zheng E laughed, "That White Peeling Leather was on the ground crying and shouting. He was saying that several decades of hard work was gone in one night."

Qin Juan laughed, "Who told him to have the surname White? He's been peeling other people's skin and plundering the things they owned. Now all he can see is a white courtyard."

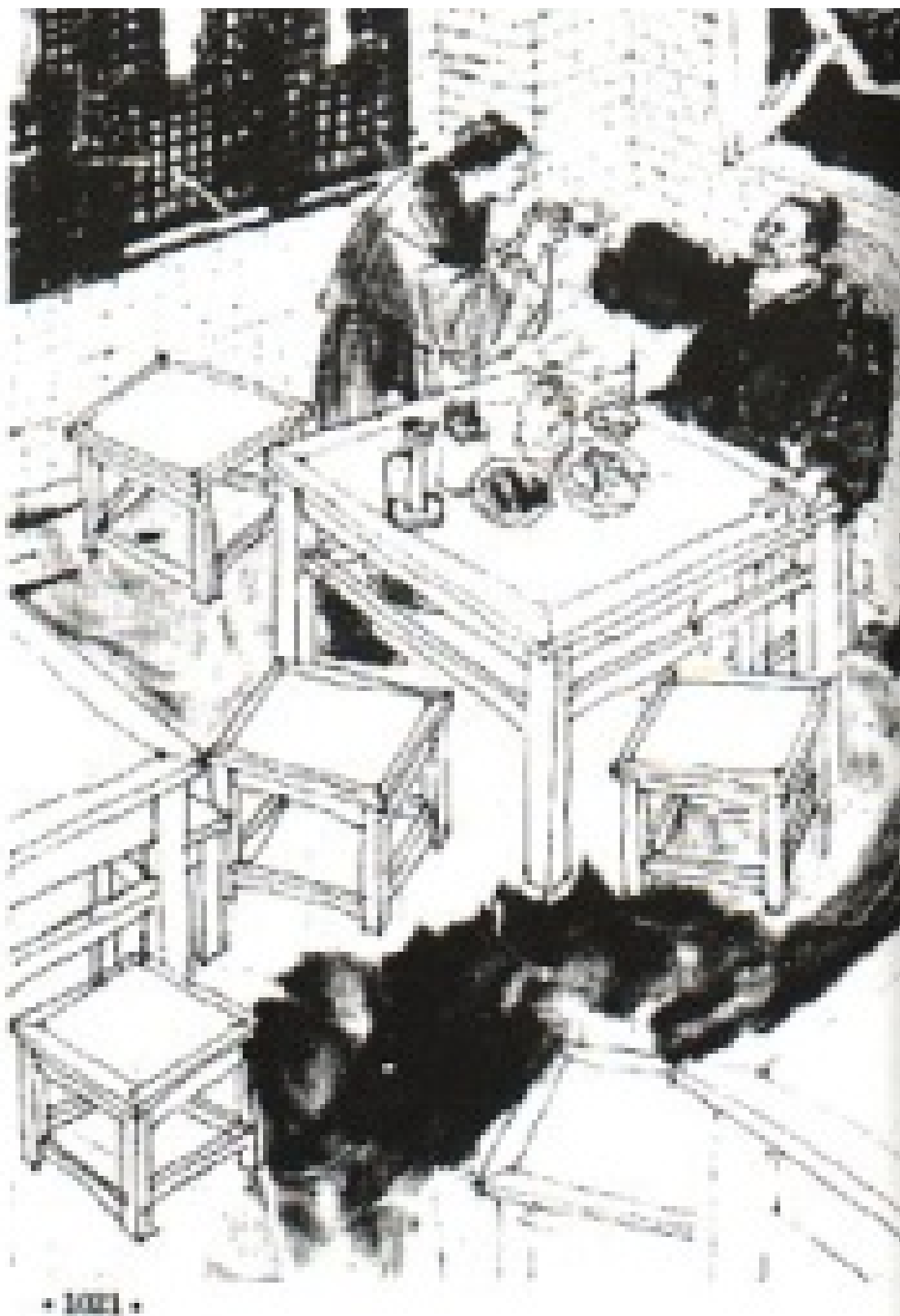
Everyone was laughing when they heard this. But not long after, they remembered about their Martial uncle and Master still being besieged by the enemies. Their moods became heavy. Linghu Chong said, "We have some funds for our journey now. Let's go catch up to them!"

# **Chapter 25: Information**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**





**After several drinks of wine, the down and out Great Mr. Mo suddenly changed into someone cheerful and**

**confident, and kept calling for more wine. But his tolerance was far less than Linghu Chong. After several bowl more, his face had become scarlet.**

The group hurried along on their horses. Every day they only slept for around four hours and they didn't tarry along the road. In a few days, they finally arrived at Zhejiang's Dragon Spring. Although Linghu Chong lost a lot of blood after being injured by Bu Chen and Sha Tianjiang, his injuries were mostly flesh wounds. With his abundant internal energy and the Heng-Shan School's medicines that he had taken, he had mostly recovered by the time they arrived inside Zhejiang's border.

The disciples were so anxious that they started to inquire about the location of the Sword-forging Valley as soon as they entered Zhejiang's border. However, none of the villagers they asked knew the location of the valley. When they finally arrived in Dragon Spring, they saw numerous sabre and sword forges. But surprisingly, none of the blacksmiths knew the location of the Sword-forging Valley.

Everyone was now feeling very worried. They asked two old nuns they met on the road but they didn't hear about any fighting. All the blacksmiths they asked also didn't hear about any fighting. As for nuns, the blacksmiths said that they frequently saw nuns around and that there was a Water Moon Temple near the east wall of the city. The disciples asked for the location of the Water Moon Temple before rushing there on horseback.

But when they arrived there, they saw the temple's main door was tightly shut. Zheng E went up to knock on the door but no one answered even after a long time. Yihe saw Zheng E knocked on the door again but they still didn't hear any sounds coming from the inside. She couldn't bear to wait anymore so she pulled her sword out and jumped over the wall to go inside. Yiqing also followed her in jumping over the wall.

"Look at it. What's this?" Yihe said as she pointed to the ground. They saw on the courtyard around seven to eight bright pieces of sword points. It looked like that they had been cut off. "Anyone inside the temple?" Yihe shouted while going inside the hall. At the same time, Yiqing opened the main door to let Linghu

Chong and the other disciples come in. Yiqing then picked up a piece of broken sword point and gave it to Linghu Chong. "Martial brother Linghu, there was some fighting here."

Linghu Chong examined the broken piece and saw that the break was very smooth. He asked, "Do Martial uncle Dingxian and Dingyi use some kind of treasured swords?"

"They don't use any treasured swords. My Master once said that we must practice our sword art till we're very good at it then we would be able to win even if we're using a wooden sword or a bamboo sword. She also said that treasured sabres and treasured swords are too overbearing. If our hands were to slip slightly then we might take someone's life or disable a person's limbs..." answered Yiqing.

Linghu Chong hummed and said, "Then these swords were not broken by martial uncles?"

Yiqing nodded her head.

They then heard Yihe shouted from behind the main hall, "There are also broken swords here."

Everyone then went towards the back courtyard through the main hall. When they got inside the hall, they saw that the tables and everything in the hall were thick with dust. In all the temples in the world, there were always people to sweep the hall and keep it clean. So judging from the amount of dust collected in the hall, it seemed the temple had been uninhabited for several days already.

In the back courtyard, Linghu Chong and the rest of the disciples saw several trees hacked by weapons. They examined the places where the trees had been hacked and realised that they were at least a few days old. There was a hole where the back door was and the door planks were tens of feet away. It looked as if the door had been kicked open. Outside the door was a small path leading to the mountains. They followed the path and after more than a hundred feet, the road branched into two. Yiqing called out, "Everyone, separate and look around. See if there's anything unusual."

Not long after, Qin Juan shouted from the right branch, "There's a projectile here." And another one also called out, "Iron awl! There's an iron awl here!"

They saw this branch of the road passed through a mountain range that went up and down. Everyone quickly rushed towards that small road. Along the road, they often saw projectiles and broken pieces of sabres and swords lying around. Suddenly, Yiqing uttered an "ah" and picked up a long sword from the bushes. She said to Linghu Chong, "It's our school's sword." Linghu Chong reasoned out loud, "Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai must have fought here. They must have come towards this direction."

Everyone knew that the Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai had fled towards this direction because they could not handle the enemies. What Linghu Chong said was only to make things sounded better. They saw a lot of weapons scattered about on the road and guessed that the fighting must have been fierce here. They had received the urgent call for help many days ago; they did not know whether there was still time to rescue them. Everyone was worried as they hurriedly went forward.

As they climbed further up, the road became more rugged as it circled around the mountain. Amongst the Heng-Shan School's disciples here, Yilin and Qin Juan had the lowest martial art and they fell behind as they kept going. After several li, the road became rocky and there was no more road to follow and also no more weapons to give them some direction. So they stopped paying attention to the road. Suddenly, they saw thick smoke rising from the back of the mountain on their left.

Linghu Chong said, "Let's go there to have a look." and they rushed towards the smoke. They saw the thick smoke getting higher and higher as they get nearer. Finally they rounded a hillside and saw a big valley. In the middle of the valley, there was a big fire roaring up into the sky. The burning woods and leaves crackled loudly. Linghu Chong hid himself behind a rock and then turned around and waved his hand telling the others not to make any sound. Just then, they heard an old person shouted, "Dingxian, Dingyi. Today, I'll send you both into the Buddhist's paradise to confirm your spritual progress in Buddhism. You don't even need to thank us."

Linghu Chong felt happy hearing this, "The two Shi Tai are still alive. Lucky we didn't arrive too late."

Another male joined in, "Chief Dongfang sincerely advised you to surrender but you persistently don't want to listen. From today, there wouldn't be a Heng-Shan School anymore."

The previous person shouted, "You mustn't blame our Divine Sun Moon Sect for being cruel and merciless. You should blame yourself for being obstinate and getting those young disciples killed in vain. What a pity. Haha, haha!"

They now saw the fire in the middle of the valley was getting larger as it burned. They knew that Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai were surrounded by the fire. Linghu Chong grasped his sword and drew a breath before shouting loudly, "Fearless Devil Sect thief, you dare to give trouble to Heng-Shan School's Shi Tai. Five Mountains Sword Schools' masters have come from everywhere to help. Thieves, you're still not surrendering?" His shout was heard everywhere in the valley.

At the valley, the firewood, stacked twenty to thirty feet high, was blocking the road. Linghu Chong didn't think deeply before he jumped inside the fire. Fortunately, the firewood in the middle wasn't burning that much. He went forward a few steps and saw two stone ovens but there was no one around. He shouted, "Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, Heng-Shan School's force has arrived to help!" At this time, Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao and the rest of the disciples were outside the fire shouting, "Master, martial uncle, disciples have arrived!" This was followed by the enemies shouting, "Kill them all!" "They're Heng-Shan School's nuns!" "They're bluffing, there's no Five Mountains Sword Schools' masters." This was followed by the clashing of swords between the enemy and the Heng-Shan School's disciples.

Linghu Chong saw a tall shadow of a person coming out of the stone oven. Her whole body was covered with blood. It was Dingyi Shi Tai. Her hand was holding a sword and she stopped at the entrance of the stone oven. Even though her gown was ragged and her face was caked with dirt and blood, she still stood there looking proud and powerful. She had not lost the aura of a master at all. When she saw Linghu Chong, she was greatly startled. "You... you are..."

Linghu Chong bowed, "Disciple Linghu Chong."

Dingyi Shi Tai said, "I know you are Linghu Chong..." She had seen his face before through the window from the outside of the Jade House brothel.

"Disciple will open the way. We'll fight our way out," said Linghu Chong as he stooped down to pick up a branch for swatting away the burning woods. Dingyi Shi Tai said, "You already joined the Devil Sect..." She said till here when they heard someone shouted, "Who has come here to disturb us?" The sabre was lightning fast as it chopped down.

Linghu Chong saw that the fire was getting more intense and the situation was desperate. But Dingyi Shi Tai was being suspicious towards him and unexpectedly didn't want to rush out with him. In this situation, he had to move fast and kill as many enemies as possible. Only then would he be able to save them out of danger.

He took a step back to avoid the sabre chopping down and that person followed his first move with a second slash. Linghu Chong countered this move by cutting off his arm holding the sabre. Then he heard a female disciple shouting sharply in misery from the outside. It was a Heng-Shan School's disciple who had met with a disaster. Linghu Chong was startled and hurriedly jumped out of the fire.

He saw a group of people on the east hillside and another group on the west hillside. The enemy had more than a hundred people with them. Some of the Heng-Shan School's disciples were already in groups of seven using the sword formation to fight the enemies. But there were still some disciples who were fighting alone as they didn't have time to form the formation. Even though those who were fighting in formation didn't have the upper hand, they were still able to hold their own. But the situation was extremely dangerous for those who were fighting alone. Two female disciples had already been killed.

Linghu Chong swept his eyes across the battlefield to assess the situation. He then saw Yilin and Qin Juan fighting back to back against three men. He gathered his qi and rushed towards them when he suddenly saw a bright light moving towards him. A long sword was being thrust towards him but Linghu Chong promptly killed him by piercing his throat.

He leaped a few times and arrived in front of Yilin. He pierced the back of one man killing him. He killed the second man by piercing the side of his body. The third person lifted his steel whip to smash it down towards Qin Juan's head but Linghu Chong reversed his sword and slashed upwards cutting off that person's arm at the shoulder. Yilin was looking pale but now there was a slight smile on her face, "Amitufo, big brother Linghu."

Linghu Chong now saw that Yu Sao was being attacked by two good fighters. He rushed towards her and slashed twice. The first slash hit the person on his lower abdomen killing him. The second slash cut off the second person's right wrist.

He turned around and rushed towards Yihe and Yiqing who were fighting against three men. Linghu Chong wielded his swords and the three men cried out miserably before they dropped dead to the ground.

Suddenly he heard an elder shouted, "Join forces and kill this servant first!"

Three grey shadows responded to this call and three swords were thrust towards his throat, chest and lower abdomen. These three sword moves were really wonderful and their positioning was masterful. These were first-class sword art. Linghu Chong was startled, "This is Songshan School's sword art! Could it be that they are from Songshan School?" As Linghu Chong thought of this, the three swords were closing in on his three fatal points. Linghu Chong used the sword-breaking stance from the Dugu Nine Swords as he circled his sword towards the three attacking swords to neutralise them. His sword intention had not finished yet as he forced the enemies to retreat a couple of steps. He saw that the enemy on his left was a fat looking Han Chinese around forty years old with a short beard on his face. The one in the middle was a thin old man with dark skin and bright-looking eyes. He didn't have the time to look at the third person clearly before he slanted his body and escaped.

With two thrusts, he killed the two people attacking Zheng E. The previous three people roared out and chased him. Linghu Chong had already made a decision, "These three people's martial arts are high and I probably won't be able to finish the fight quickly. If I fight too long with them, a lot of disciples from

Heng-Shan School would be injured." He gathered his qi and started running non-stop to the east and west thrusting here and there. His sword was everywhere. With each thrust, an enemy either fell down to the ground or was killed.

Those three masters were still chasing him but the distance between them stayed around ten feet as they weren't able to close in on him. In the time to drink a pot of tea, thirty people had been injured by Linghu Chong's sword. They were being routed as not a single person was able to stop a single move from him. As thirty of the enemies were injured in such a short time, the situation was now reversed. For every enemy that Linghu Chong killed, he slowly managed to free some Heng-Shan School's disciples from the fighting, enabling them to go help the other disciples. In the beginning, the Heng-Shan School was outnumbered greatly by the enemy but now they were gradually turning the situation around and were getting the upper hand. Linghu Chong knew that this fighting today was very dangerous for everyone. He decided that he couldn't spare anyone. If he didn't manage to push the enemy back in a short time then the fire would get even bigger and Dingxian Shi Tai and everyone else inside the stone oven would be unable to escape.

It was as if he was flying, he was sometimes rushing forward and sometimes rushing at an angle. All the enemies within ten feet of him had no way of escaping. Not long after, another twenty enemies had dropped to the ground. Dingyi was surveying the battle scene standing on top of the stone oven. She saw Linghu Chong appearing and disappearing like a demon killing those enemies. His sword art was wonderfully skillful and she had never seen it before. She felt really happy and astonished at the same time. There were around forty to fifty enemies left and they had seen Linghu Chong rampaging like a demon with no one able to resist him. Suddenly, someone sent out a cry and around twenty people escaped into the surrounding grove. After Linghu Chong had killed several more people, the remaining enemies lost their will to fight. Before long, all the enemies who were able had escaped.

Only those three masters still remained as they chased after him but the distance between them was gradually getting



farther. It seemed that they were also afraid of him. Linghu Chong stopped suddenly and turned around. He shouted, "You're from Songshan School, aren't you?" Those three people quickly jumped back.

That tall Han Chinese shouted, "Sir, who are you?"

Linghu Chong didn't answer him but called out to Yu Sao and the other disciples, "Quickly open up a way to save your master, martial-uncle and the others."

The female disciples cut some tree branches and started to beat on the burning firewood while Yihe and a few other disciples jumped inside the fire. The dry branches were already burnt through to the core that they weren't able to extinguish the fire. But everyone worked together to beat on the firewood and before long a gap had been opened up in the fire. Yihe and the others quickly helped the suffocated nuns get out from the inside of the stone oven.

"How's Dingxian Shi Tai?" Linghu Chong asked.

He heard an elderly female's voice answered, "Thank you for your concern." as a nun of medium stature slowly walked out of the ring of fire. Her white gown wasn't stained at all with blood or dirt. There was no weapon on her right hand. In her left hand, instead of a weapon, she held a strand of Buddhist prayer beads. Her appearance was kindly with her spirit calm and her aura leisurely. Linghu Chong was surprised, "Dingxian Shi Tai is so serene. Even after all the difficulties she went through, she still managed to keep her calm countenance. She really lives up to her reputation." He approached and bowed to her, "Linghu Chong pays his respect to Shi Tai." Dingxian Shi Tai returned his propriety but warned, "Someone's attacking. Be careful."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong calmly answered.

Without turning his body, he reversed his sword and slashed it backwards blocking that fat Han Chinese's sword and said, "Disciples was late in coming to help. Shi Tai, please forgive this sin." He blocked a few more thrust from that fat Han Chinese when two more swords were thrust at his back.

At this time, more than ten nuns came out of the fire ring carrying their martial sisters' corpses. Dingyi Shi Tai took large strides to emerge from the fire while saying fiercely, "Shameless

traitor, that wolf's wild schemes..." The bottom of her gown had caught on fire but she didn't care about it at all. Yu Sao went to her to beat on the gown and extinguished the fire.

Linghu Chong exclaimed, "Both Shi Tai are well! This is a joyous occasion." Just then, the sounds of "chi, chi" could be heard behind his body as three long swords were thrust simultaneously at him. At this time, Linghu Chong's sword art was not only one of the best but also not many in this world could match his internal energy strength. Not only did he hear the edge of the swords splitting the air, his internal energy also felt it and he automatically knew the enemies' sword paths. He wielded his long sword and countered the enemies' strikes. But those three people's martial arts were very high and their movements were lightning fast, which enabled them to escape from Linghu Chong's thrust. But the back of the tall Han Chinese's hand was still slashed and fresh blood started to flow. Linghu Chong questioned, "Shi Tai, Songshan School is the leader of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. Also, they have brotherly ties with Heng-Shan School, why would they suddenly attack your school? I don't understand a single thing."

"Where's martial sister? How come she didn't come?" Dingyi Shi Tai asked.

Qin Juan cried as she answered, "Master... master was besieged by evildoers. She fought vigorously until... until she perished..."

Dingyi Shi Tai was grieved and indignant as she scolded, "Good thieves!" and started to take large strides forward. But after only a few steps, she started to sway that she had to sit down on the ground heavily and threw up some blood from her mouth.

Even though the three Songshan School's masters were cooperating to fight Linghu Chong, they were still unable to endure his attack. Throughout the fight, they had only been looking at the back of his body while Linghu Chong was fighting with the long sword reversed in his hand. His sword art was marvellous and unpredictable. If he actually had turned around to fight them, they would not be his match at all. The three

people were secretly feeling miserable and they were thinking of running away.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong turned around and started to attack them. He attacked the enemy on the left from the left and the enemy on the right from the right forcing them to crowd together. His one sword was able to encircle them and after eighteen moves they were unable to return another move. All three people were using Songshan School's wonderful sword art. But under the unceasing attack of Dugu Nine Swords, they were unable to return another move. Linghu Chong actually forced them to use their own school's sword art so they wouldn't be able to deny their association any further. He saw that even though sweat was flowing down on their faces, their expressions were still fearsome and their sword arts were still executed properly. It seemed that each of them had at least practised their sword art for at least ten years; it was really amazing.

"Amitufo. Martial brother Zhao, martial brother Zhang, martial brother Sima, my Heng-Shan School and your respectable school has no enmity with each other. Why did the three of you attack us and wanted to burn us to death? Poor nun doesn't understand and would like to consult with you," Dingxian Shi Tai said.

Those three Songshan School's masters really did have the surnames of Zhao, Zhang, and Sima. The three of them rarely traveled in Jianghu and their positions in the school were a secret. Linghu Chong had already given them so much trouble and now suddenly Dingxian Shi Tai called their surnames out. They were startled.

"Qiang lang", "qiang lang".

Two of them were hit on the wrists and dropped their swords. Linghu Chong pointed his sword at the short person's throat and commanded, "Drop the sword!" That old short person sighed and exclaimed, "The world unexpectedly has this kind of martial art, this kind of sword art! Zhao has been defeated by your sword and I wouldn't regard it as injustice." After saying this, he gathered his qi, passed it into his hand and broke his sword into seven or eight pieces. Linghu Chong moved back a few steps and

Yihe with six other disciples drew their long swords and surrounded these three people.

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly said, "Your respectable school wishes to combine the five mountains sword schools into one and create the Five Mountains School. Heng-Shan School has been around for several hundred years. Poor nun doesn't dare to end the school at my hand so I refused your school's proposal. We've already exhausted the discussion on this matter already. But now you disguised yourself as the Devil Sect and tried to wipe out my Heng-Shan School. Isn't this method too high-handed?"

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly butted in, "Why is martial sister saying so much to them? Just kill them so they won't give us anymore trouble in the future... " She then coughed a few times and vomited blood again at the same time.

That tall person surnamed Sima said, "We were just following an order to dispatch a message. We didn't know any details at all..."

"Let them kill us or peel our skins off, why do you need to talk to them?" that old man Zhao indignantly chided.

Sima shut his mouth and stopped talking after being scolded. He looked ashamed.

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "Thirty years ago, the three of you were running amuck in Hebei but suddenly you just disappeared without a trace. Poor nun thought that the three of you had turned away from your unruly ways. But I didn't expect that you would join and conspire with the Songshan School. Ai, Songshan School's leader Zuo is a respected person of our generation but he has accepted many unorthodox... Jianghu's unusual warriors, and together with them cause problems. This is really harboring evil... Ai, I don't understand this." Although she had changed her mind at this time, she still didn't want to offend anyone with her speech. She felt that she might have spoken too much and immediately stopped talking. She sighed, "My martial sister Dingjing Shi Tai, was she harmed by your respectable school as well?"

That cowardly person with the surname Sima wanted to make up for before so he said in a loud voice, "Right, that's martial brother Zhong..."

"Hey!" rebuked that old person surnamed Zhao as he indignantly stared at him.

That person surnamed Sima realised that he had said the wrong thing, but he still continued, "Now that it has come to this, what's there to hide anymore?"

Leader Zuo divided our forces into two. Each force came to Zhejiang to handle the matter."

"Amitufo, amitufo. Leader Zuo is already the head of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. What higher honour does he want by joining the five schools and becoming its leader? So he wages a war and destroys our alliance, wouldn't the Jianghu heroes laugh at this?" asked Dingxian Shi Tai.

Dingyi Shi Tai fiercely said, "Martial sister, this thief's wild scheme is insatiably greedy... you..."

Dingxian Shi Tai waved her hand then said to those three people, "The net of Heaven stretches everywhere, they might be loose but they never miss. You will suffer retribution for these unrighteous conducts. Get out of here! I'd bother the three of you to tell Leader Zuo that from now on, Heng-Shan School will no longer receive his order. Although my humble school only has weak females, we would not yield under his violence. We won't follow Leader Zuo's order to combine the schools."

Yihe called out, "Martial uncle, they're... they're very malicious..."

"Withdraw the sword formation!" ordered Dingxian Shi Tai.

"Yes!" replied Yihe. Complying with the order, she lifted her sword which was followed by the other six disciples. They then retreated several steps.

Those three masters from Songshan School never expected that they would be released so easily. They couldn't help but feel appreciative as they bowed towards Dingxian Shi Tai. They then turned around and flew off. When they were tens of feet away, that old man Zhao stopped and turned around. He asked in a clear voice, "May I ask the young hero with the godly sword art for your honourable surname and given name? I was defeated today though I don't dare hope to take revenge. But I would like to learn the name of the great hero who taught you and the name of this sword art."

Linghu Chong laughed, "This General is from Quanzhou prefecture. I'm called General Wu Tiande! Let's exchange names." That old person knew that Linghu Chong's answer was fake so he sighed and turned around to go.

At this time, the fire had gotten larger. There were many dead people from the Songshan School lying on the ground. More than ten of the Songshan people who were lightly injured had slowly crawled out of the valley while those who were heavily injured were lying in pools of blood. They saw the fire was getting closer but they were too powerless to move away. Some of them shouted for help. Dingxian Shi Tai said, "They didn't do this on their own accord. It was Leader Zuo who ordered them to come here because of an error in his thought. Yu Sao, Yiqing, help them." They knew that their Abbess was a merciful person and they didn't dare to disobey her. They separately started to check on the injured Songshan School's people. Those who were still breathing were helped to the side and given some medicine.

Dingxian Shi Tai looked towards the south and there were teardrops falling down her cheeks. She cried out "Martial sister!" She then swayed a few times and fell forward.

Everyone was startled and quickly rushed to her side to support her. They saw fresh blood flowing down from the side of her mouth. It seemed that her injuries were just as serious as Dingyi Shi Tai. The disciples were all frightened and didn't know what to do. They all turned around and looked at Linghu Chong wanting to hear his idea.

Linghu Chong instructed, "Quickly give the two Shi Tai medicines for their wounds. For the injured, wrap their wounds first to stop the bleeding. The fire is still going strong in this place. Everybody, let's go there to rest. Can I ask a few martial sisters to go and look for some fruits to eat?"

The disciples responded to his order and separately did the tasks. Zheng E and Qin Juan attended to Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and the injured disciples. They got some water from the creek with a kettle for them to drink with the medicine. During the Dragon Spring fight, thirty-seven of the Heng-Shan School's disciples died. When the disciples thought of how Dingjing Shi Tai and the other disciples had died, their hearts were full of grief.

Suddenly, a few people started to cry and this affected the rest of the disciples. They all started to cry. All of a sudden, the valley was filled with cries of sorrow. Dingyi Shi Tai fiercely scolded, "The dead are already dead, why do you take this so hard? You have all read the Buddhist's sutras and comprehend this matter of "life and death". What's so good about this smelly sack of leather?" The disciples knew that Dingyi Shi Tai's nature was like a raging fire. No one dared to go against her wish. In a short time, the weeping sounds ceased but many of them were still sobbing. Dingyi Shi Tai continued, "How did martial sister finally meet her end? E'er, why don't you report to Abbess and tell us clearly what happened."

"Yes," answered Zheng E. She stood up and started to narrate how they were ambushed in the Xianxia mountain range, how Linghu Chong helped them, how they were captured in Nianbapu town with the use of confusion poison, how Dingjing Shi Tai was threatened by Songshan School's Zhong Zhen and then besieged by masked men, how Linghu Chong luckily caught up and drove them away, and how Dingjing Shi Tai finally succumbed to her heavy injuries. She narrated everything to them.

Dingyi Shi Tai uttered, "That's how it is. Songshan School's thieves were pretending to be Devil Sect to compel martial sister to agree to the merger. Hng, how vicious. If you had all been captured by Songshan School and martial sister didn't agree, it could've been disastrous." As she said this, she ran out of breath and her voice became weak. After taking a breather, she continued, "When martial sister was besieged on the Xianxia mountain range, she knew that the enemies weren't easy to handle so she dispatched the pigeons asking for us to send help. Unexpectedly... unexpectedly... this matter, was already anticipated by the enemies."

Dingxian Shi Tai's second disciple, Yiwon, said, "Martial uncle, please rest, disciple will narrate how our group met with the enemies."

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly retorted, "What's there to tell? Water Moon Temple was attacked by the enemy at night. And we've been fighting continuously till today."

Yiwon said, "Yes."

It was just a simple narration of how they had been fighting with the enemies for many days. That night, Songshan School's people raided the temple wearing masks and pretending to be the Devil Sect. The attack on Heng-Shan School that time was so swift that the nuns were worried of being annihilated. Luckily, Water Moon Temple was an artery of Wulin and it stored five treasured swords from the Dragon Spring. In that critical situation, Abbess Qingxiao distributed the treasured swords to Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai to fight the enemies. Dragon Spring's treasured swords were able to cut through iron as if it were mud. They used the treasured swords to cut many weapons and injured many enemies. They retreated as they fought until they reached this valley. Qingxiao Shi Tai died in protecting them.

This valley used to produce fine iron and several hundred years ago metals were cast here. Later, the iron ran out and the sword forges were moved somewhere else. The only remaining things in this valley were a few stone ovens for smelting. It was lucky that those stone ovens were around as it enabled the Heng-Shan School to fight with the ovens at their back. By doing this, they were able to hold out for many days and averted a big disaster. When Songshan School was unable to break through with their attack, they collected firewood and tried to use fire to burn them. If Linghu Chong and the other disciples had arrived half a day late, it would have been very difficult to save them. Dingyi Shi Tai was impatient to get to the end of Yiwen's narration of the events of the past few days. She stared at Linghu Chong and suddenly said, "You... you are good. Why did your Master expel you from his school? He said that you were colluding with the Devil Sect."

Linghu Chong answered, "Disciple wasn't careful while traveling and became acquainted with a few Devil Sect's people."

Dingyi Shi Tai uttered an "hng" before saying, "Songshan School is even more ambitious and vicious compared to what Devil Sect is capable of. Hng! Are people from the orthodox schools better than those from the Devil Sect?"

Yihe said, "Martial brother Linghu, I wouldn't dare to judge whether your master was right or wrong. But he... he knew clearly



that my school was facing a difficulty but he just put his hand in his sleeve and would rather be a spectator. Given this... given this... maybe he already approved of Songshan School's plan of combining the schools together."

Linghu Chong's heart was moved and he thought that what Yihe said was not unreasonable. But he had grown up under his respected master and had always looked up to him. So he didn't dare to have any disrespectful thought towards his master. He said, "My respected master wasn't putting his hand in his sleeve and acting as a spectator. It's most likely that he has another matter... this..."

Up until now, Dingxian Shi Tai had her eyes closed to meditate. Now, she slowly opened her eyes and said, "My humble school has met with a few big difficulties and young hero Linghu has helped us get through them. This virtue and kindness..."

Linghu Chong hastily said, "I didn't do much. Martial uncle's words flatter me too much. I don't deserve it."

Dingxian Shi Tai shook her head and said, "Why must young hero be so modest? Martial brother Yue is unable to come himself so he sent his eldest disciple to represent him. That's just the same. Yihe, don't talk nonsense and be rude to your elders."

Yihe bowed, "Yes, disciple doesn't dare. But... but martial brother Linghu has already been expelled from Huashan School. Martial uncle Yue doesn't want him anymore. So he didn't really come here to represent martial uncle Yue's school."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled slightly, "You still don't want to give in and want to keep debating it."

Yihe sighed, "It would be good if only martial brother Linghu were a female."

"Why?" asked Dingxian Shi Tai.

"He's already been expelled from Huashan School and couldn't go back there again. If he were a girl then he could join our school. We've shared a lot of trials and tribulations together, he's already like our own people..." answered Yihe.

Dingyi Shi Tai shouted, "Nonsense. You're grown up already, but you're still speaking like a child."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled slightly, "Martial brother Yue must have misunderstood something. Later in the future, he will see

clearly and would accept young hero Linghu back into his school. When the news of Songshan School's plot spread, he would not be able to just sit back any longer given the situation. Then Huashan School would need young hero Linghu to rely on. Also, if he couldn't go back to Huashan, with his martial art, he could just establish his own school and no one would blame him."

Zheng E said, "What martial uncle said is true. Martial brother Linghu, Huashan School's people treated you so badly. Why don't you just establish a... a "Linghu School" and show it to them. Hng, then why do you still have to return to Huashan School?"

Linghu Chong smiled bitterly and said, "Martial uncle speaks so highly of me. Disciple is not worthy of your praise. If only my respected master would forgive my faults in the future and permit me to reenter the school, then I won't have anything more to ask from him."

"Nothing more to ask from him? How about your little martial sister?" Zheng E asked.

Linghu Chong shook his head and changed the topic, "Shall we bury the remains of martial sisters or cremate them and take the ashes back to Hengshan?"

Dingxian Shi Tai answered, "Cremate them!" and her voice started to choke as she saw the dead bodies of her disciples lying on the ground. Even though she completely understood the human affairs, they had been her disciples for many years and she couldn't help but feel sad. A few of the disciples started crying again on hearing this.

Some of the disciples had been dead for several days already and some were hundreds of feet away. While the disciples were moving the bodies, they all kept scolding Songshan School's leader Zuo Lengchan for having sinister intentions and methods. After they had finished cremating their martial sisters' bodies, the sky had turned dark, so they stayed the night in the wild mountain under the stars.

At dawn, the disciples carried Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and their injured martial sisters on their backs. When they arrived at the Dragon Spring town, they went to the harbor and hired seven black boats to travel to the north. Linghu Chong was

still afraid that Songshan School might attack them while traveling on water so he followed them north. Now that there were two elders traveling with the Heng-Shan School's party, Linghu Chong controlled himself and didn't dare to talk nonsense to the female disciples anymore.

Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and the injured disciples' injuries were not light but luckily Heng-Shan School's medicines were very effective. By the time they had passed Qian Tang River, their injuries were not life threatening anymore. As many of the Heng-Shan School's disciples were injured, they didn't want to encounter any incidents on the road and also wanted to avoid meeting anyone from Jianghu. When they reached the Yangtze River, they hired different boats to go upstream towards the Jiangxi Province. They traveled slowly in this manner. When they arrived in Hankou, about six or seven out of ten of the injured had already recovered. So they went back on the road and continued going north towards Hengshan.

On the day they arrived at the bank of Poyang Lake, there were several boats anchored at the mouth of the Nine River. These riverboats were really big and all of them were able to fit into two boats. At midnight, Linghu Chong was sleeping at the stern of the boat with the sailors when he suddenly heard light clapping from the bank of the river. They clapped three times, stopped for a moment, then clapped for another three times. This was followed by clapping from a boat west of them. A person on that boat clapped three times, stopped for a moment, then clapped for another three times. The sound of the clapping was very light but Linghu Chong still managed to hear it, as his abundant internal energy made his hearing superb.

He immediately woke up upon hearing these unusual sounds as he knew that these were the signals of Jianghu's people greeting each other. For the last few days, he had been watching attentively for unusual signs to protect against any surprise attack. He thought, "No harm in having a look. If it's unrelated to Heng-Shan School then it's good. Otherwise, I'll just take care of it in secret. There's no need to bother Dingxian Shi Tai and the rest of them." He squinted his eyes to look at the boat at the west and saw a black shadow with average qinggong jumping for

around ten feet repeatedly till he reached the shore. Linghu Chong lightly flew off and landed on the shore noiselessly. He then went around the back of a row of big baskets filled with oil on the east side. As he hid himself behind the baskets, he heard a person said, "Those nuns on the boat must be from Heng-Shan School."

The other person asked, "What should we do?"

Linghu Chong slowly got nearer and the glimmering light from the stars and moon allowed him to see the faces of the two people. One of them had a face full of beard while the other one had a long and pointed face which was not only oval but was also like an open sunflower seed face. He then heard that Han Chinese with the pointed face said, "White Flood Dragon Clan<sup>24</sup> is the only one doing this. Although we have a lot of people, our martial art isn't higher than other people so we shouldn't trade blows with them."

"Who said we're going to trade blows? These nuns' martial art might be good but on water, their water skill might not be that good. Tomorrow, we'll get a boat to go over to their boat. Then we'll go under water to bore some holes in their boats. Then we'll just capture them one by one," That bearded person said.

That pointed-faced Han Chinese happily said, "This plan is very clever. We two brothers would've done a great service for the Nine River's White Flood Dragon Clan. From now on, our names would be heard throughout Jianghu. But I'm still worried about one thing."

"What are you worried about?" asked the bearded person.

"They're in the Five Mountains Sword Schools alliance. They have a saying, same root different branches. If Mr. Mo Da found out about this, he wouldn't let the White Flood Dragon Clan get away with it," replied the pointed face.

"Hng, for the past several years, we've always endured with Hengshan School's influence. Enough already! This time if we don't do this thing for our friend and with all our hearts then if we met with a problem in the future, they won't help us. When we're done with this, maybe Hengshan School would be annihilated, why are you still afraid of Mr. Mo Da for?" said the bearded face.

"Alright, that's the plan then. Let's look for some help who can swim well," said the pointed face agreeing to the plan.

Linghu Chong leapt out and used his sword handle to hit the pointed face at the back of his head knocking him out. That bearded face person threw a punch but Linghu Chong extended his sword handle and hit his left Taiyang acupoint, which made him spin around a few times like a screw before plunking down heavily on the ground. Linghu Chong extended his long sword across to open the lids of the two oil baskets. He picked those two people up and separately squeezed them into the baskets. The baskets were filled with vegetable oil and each weighed around three hundred catties. They were actually for that day's shipments. As the two people were dunked into the basket, their whole bodies were immersed in oil and oil entered their nose and mouth. The cold oil woke them up immediately and made them gasp for air but they only managed to swallow some oil instead. Suddenly, someone at Linghu Chong's back said, "Young hero Linghu, don't kill them."

It was Dingxian Shi Tai's voice. Linghu Chong was slightly alarmed, "When did Dingxian Shi Tai get behind me? I wasn't aware of it." He quickly took both of his hands off their heads and replied, "Yes!" As soon as their heads were released, they wanted to jump out of the basket but Linghu Chong hit the top of their heads forcing them back in and laughingly commanded, "Don't move!"

Those two people had their knees bent to crouch inside while the oil reached up to their necks and they were having trouble opening their eyes. They were entirely confused about how they had gotten into such difficult circumstances. They then saw another grey shadow leapt from the boat towards the bank. It was Dingyi Shi Tai and she asked, "Martial sister, did you catch some thieves?"

"They're the hall leaders of the Nine River's White Flood Dragon Clan. Young hero Linghu is playing a joke with them." replied Dingxian Shi Tai. She then turned her head towards the bearded face person and asked, "Sir, is your surname Yi or Qi? Is clan leader well?"

That bearded person's surname really was Yi and he asked, "My... my surname is Yi, how did you know? Our clan leader is well."

Dingxian smiled, "White Flood Dragon Clan's hall leader Yi and hall leader Qi are famously known in Jianghu as "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish". Old nun has heard of your names, they're like thunder entering the ears."<sup>25</sup>

Dingxian Shi Tai was very meticulous; although she rarely went out of the temple, she kept detailed knowledge of all the personalities from every school and every sect. Otherwise, how could she have recognised those three masters from Songshan School previously? The bearded person surnamed Yi and the pointed-faced person surnamed Qi were third or fourth class personalities in Wulin. But as soon as she saw their countenances, she was able to guess their backgrounds correctly.

That pointed-faced Han Chinese felt proud of himself that Dingxian Shi Tai had recognised him and said, "Like thunder entering the ears? I wouldn't dare." Linghu Chong used his sword to press the top of the pointed face's head, forcing him to submerge in the oil and then released his hold. He then laughed, "I've long admired your name, like oil entering the ears." That Han Chinese indignantly said, "You... you... " He wanted to scold Linghu Chong but he didn't dare.

Linghu Chong said, "I have one thing to ask, why don't you answer truthfully. If you lie in the slightest bit, then your nickname "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" will change into "Mud Loaches Dead in Oil". He then also pressed that bearded fellow into the oil. But that bearded fellow was already prepared for this so he didn't swallow any oil but the vegetable oil still entered his nose. So he was still feeling distressed over this. Dingxian Shi Tai and Dingyi Shi Tai couldn't hold back their smiles and both thought, "This youth is really naughty. But this can be regarded as a good method to get information."

Linghu Chong asked, "When did your White Flood Dragon Clan start colluding with Songshan School? Why did you want to trouble Heng-Shan School?"

That bearded person was confused, "Collude with Songshan School? That's weird. We don't even know any hero from

Songshan School."

Linghu Chong said, "Aha! The first word that came out of your mouth is false. I'll give you a mouthful of oil to drink!" He used his sword to press down on the bearded person forcing him to enter the oil. Although this bearded person was not a first class master, his martial art wasn't that weak. But Linghu Chong transferred his abundant internal energy into his sword. It was as if a thousand catties stone was being pressed onto his head making him unable to move up. The vegetable oil covered both his nose and mouth and exposed both of his eyes. He was feeling very miserable.

Linghu Chong said towards the pointed face man, "Quickly tell me! You want to remain 'Yangtze River's Flying Fish' or become 'Mud Loach Immersed in Oil'?"

That person surnamed Qi answered, "Now that I've met with Hero, even if I don't want to be 'Mud Loach Immersed in Oil', I might still have to become one. But brother Yi didn't lie; we really don't know anyone from Songshan School. Also, Songshan School and Heng-Shan School are allies and everyone in Wulin knows this. Why would Songshan School tell our White Flood Dragon Clan to make life difficult for... your respectable school?"

Linghu Chong released his long sword letting that person surnamed Yi to lift his head above the oil. He then asked, "You said that tomorrow in the middle of Yangtze River, you were going to sink Heng-Shan School's boats. What has Heng-Shan School done to wrong you?"

Dingyi Shi Tai arrived late so she didn't know why Linghu Chong treated those two people in this manner. But hearing what he said, she became angry and shouted, "Good thieves. You want to kill us in the middle of the river." Her Heng-Shan School's disciples were mostly from the north and they couldn't swim. If the boats were sunk then many disciples would inevitably die. As she thought of this, her body trembled with fear.

That Yi person was afraid that Linghu Chong might push him under the oil again so he quickly said, "Heng-Shan School and our White Flood Dragon Clan have no enmity. We're only a small gang in Nine River's dock. What kind of skills do we have to look for trouble with all the Shi Tai from Heng-Shan School? It's just...

it's just that we know that you Buddhists are all one family and we saw your respectable school going westward. So we thought that you were going there to help. That's why... this... we overrate our own ability and concoct this evil plan. We don't dare anymore."

As Linghu Chong heard more, he became even more confused, "What do you mean Buddhists are one family and who do we help by going west? You're not speaking clearly!"

That Yi person said, "Yes, yes! Although Shaolin Temple isn't part of the Five Mountains Sword Schools, we thought that monks and nuns are of one family..."

Dingyi Shi Tai shouted, "Nonsense!"

That Yi person was startled and he involuntarily pulled back and swallowed a mouthful of oil. He was speechless with his mouth feeling so greasy. Dingyi Shi Tai held her smile and said to the pointed face person, "Explain it clearly."

That Qi person said, "Yes, yes! That "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, does Shi Tai know him well?"

Dingyi Shi Tai was indignant as she thought in her heart why would she be well acquainted to such a notorious rapist in Jianghu as "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang and that this servant actually dared to ask her this question. It was really the greatest insult to her. She lifted her right hand to smash his head open. Dingxian Shi Tai lifted her hand to hinder her and said, "Martial sister, don't be angry. These two have been indulging themselves in the oil basket for a long time now, their brains are probably not too clear right now. Furthermore, don't lower yourself to their level."

That Qi person asked, "What's wrong with Tian Boguang? That "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, uncle Tian is a good friend of our clan leader. These last few days, uncle Tian..."

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly said, "What uncle Tian? You should've killed this despicable evildoer a long time ago. But you're making friends with him instead, I think White Flood Dragon Clan isn't a good clan after all."

That Qi person agreed in a hurry, "Yes, yes, yes. We're not... not good people."



Dingyi Shi Tai questioned, "We asked you before, why did you want to trouble Heng-Shan School? Why do you mention Tian Boguang regarding this?"

Tian Boguang had been inappropriate with her disciple Yilin once before. But Dingyi Shi Tai had yet been unable to kill him to vent her anger so she felt that this was a shameful matter to her. So she didn't wish this person to mention Tian Boguang's name.

That Qi person said, "Yes, yes. Everybody's going to rescue young lady Ren. We were afraid that the orthodox schools are going to help the monks. That's why we two brothers didn't think properly and confusedly cooked up this plan. This method that we wanted to employ towards your respectable school..."

Dingyi Shi Tai still didn't understand in the slightest bit what he was going on about. She sighed, "Martial sister, I'll just let you question these two muddy people."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled and asked, "Young lady Ren, is that the Devil Sect's previous Chief's daughter?"

Linghu Chong was shocked, "They're talking about Yingying?" His face turned pale and his hands started to sweat.

That Qi person answered, "Yes. Uncle Tian... no, that Tian... Tian Boguang came to Nine River some time ago to drink wine with clan leader Shi. He said that on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month, we are all going to go to Shaolin Temple to make some disturbance and get young lady Ren out of there."

Unable to tolerate what was being said, Dingyi Shi Tai interfered, "Disturb Shaolin Temple? What kind of skills do you think you have to provoke the best there is in the martial world?"

That Qi person replied, "Yes, yes. Of course we're inadequate."

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "That Tian Boguang has the fastest qinggong so he's acting as a messenger, isn't he? Who's presiding over this matter?"

That Yi person answered, "When we heard that young lady Ren was being kept in the Shaolin Temple by those thieves... no, by the Shaolin monks, we all took action separately without consulting each other. We all wanted to save her but there's no one presiding over this matter. We remembered young lady Ren's

kindness, so we all said that we're willing to sacrifice ourselves for her."

A moment later, Linghu Chong's heart was filled with countless doubts, "That young lady Ren they're talking about, is it really Yingying? Why would the Shaolin monks detain her? She's so young; what kind of kindness could she have given to these people? Why did so many people want to go and save her without caring about their own life after hearing news of her trouble?"

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "You were afraid that my Heng-Shan School would go and help Shaolin School. That's why you wanted to sink our boats, didn't you?"

"Yes, we thought that monks and nuns... this... that..." That Qi person stammered.

"What this that?" Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly said.

"Yes, yes. This... that... I don't dare say it. I can't say..." That Qi person hastily said.

"On the fifteenth of the twelfth month, your White Flood Dragon Clan is also going to Shaolin?" Dingxian Shi Tai asked.

They both answered at the same time, "We'll obey clan leader Shi's command."

That Qi person went on, "Since everyone else is going, our White Flood Dragon Clan couldn't be left behind."

Dingxian Shi Tai asked, "Everyone? Who's everyone?"

That Qi person answered, "That Tian... Tian Boguang said, Zhejiang's West Sea Sand Clan, Black Wind of East Mountain Association, Western Hunan Sect, ..." In a single breath, he was able to say the name of thirty clans from Jianghu. This person's martial art was only average, but he was able to remember the name of all the clans involved.

Dingyi Shi Tai scowled, "They're all unorthodox clans. Even though they have lots of people, they're not necessarily a match for Shaolin School."

Among the names mentioned by that Qi person were Heavenly River Faction's Chief "Silver-Bearded Dragon" Huang Boliu, Long Whale Island's Chief Sima Big, and a few other people that Linghu Chong had met before on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge. He had no more doubt that the person that they wanted to

save really was Yingying and he was happy to have gotten news of her. But she was currently detained in Shaolin School and she had killed a few of their disciples before, so he felt really worried. He asked, "Why did Shaolin School want to detain this... this young lady Ren?"

"I don't know about that. Maybe those Shaolin monks have been eating too much and have nothing else to do. So they just look for trouble and detain her," That Qi person said.

"Please pay my respect to your respectable clan leader Shi and tell him that Heng-Shan School's Dingxian, Dingyi and a good friend passed by the Nine River. We've been impolite for not paying a visit to clan leader Shi; please ask clan leader Shi to excuse us. Tomorrow, we'll keep going to the west by boats. Please pardon us and don't dispatch people to sink our boats," Dingxian Shi Tai said.

Those two people immediately answered, "We don't dare."

Dingxian Shi Tai said to Linghu Chong, "It's a fine night, the moon is white and the air is clear. Young hero, please enjoy the night scenery at the shore slowly. Forgive poor nun for not accompanying." She then held Dingyi Shi Tai's hand and slowly went back to the boat.

Linghu Chong knew that she intentionally left him alone so that he could question these two people further. But for the moment, he was utterly confused and didn't know what else to ask. He just walked back and forth on the riverbank and didn't say anything for a long time. He saw half of the moon's reflection in the middle of the river. The river was flowing to the east and the moon's reflection was trembling incessantly. He suddenly thought, "Today is already the third week of the eleventh month. There's not much time left till the fifteenth of next month when they're going to the Shaolin Temple. Shaolin School's Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng treated me very well. When these people go to save Yingying, a big fight is bound to happen there. No matter who wins or who loses, the injuries to both sides will be enormous. Why don't I go in front of them and ask Abbott Fangzheng to release Yingying and avoid this bloodbath. Wouldn't this be better?"

He thought more, "Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai's injuries are almost fully healed. Although Dingxian Shi Tai's outward appearance is just like any other nun, she's actually very knowledgeable and her experience is vast. She's actually one of Wulin's great masters with very high skill. She's leading them back north; I don't think they'd meet another large number of Songshan School people attacking them. So they'd be able to deal with any kind of calamities they might face. But how can I just say goodbye to them?"

He had gone through a lot of trials and tribulations with these nuns and ladies. They treated him very respectfully and they were also very close and dear to him. Also, although he never mentioned about the time when his master expelled him or when his little martial sister abandoned him, he could tell from their expressions that they shared his sadness as if it was their own. In the Huashan School, besides Lu Dayou, there was no one else that close to him. Now, he suddenly had to say goodbye to them, it was really hard for him to speak up. He heard the light footsteps of two people coming closer to him. They were Yilin and Zheng E. When they were still twenty to thirty feet away from Linghu Chong, they called out, "Big brother Linghu." and stopped coming closer.

Linghu Chong went up to welcome them, "You were also woken up?"

Yilin said, "Big brother Linghu, martial uncle Abbess asked us to come to tell you..." She pushed Zheng E and said, "You tell him."

"Martial uncle Abbess wants you to say it," Zheng E said.

"You say it, it's the same," Yilin said.

"Big brother Linghu, martial uncle Abbess said, we don't need to say thanks for your kindness. After today, no matter what kind of matter you have, Heng-Shan School will follow your order. If you want to go to Shaolin to save that young lady Ren, everyone will help you with all their hearts," Zheng E said.

Linghu Chong was surprised and thought, "I didn't say that I was going to save Yingying, how on earth did Dingxian Shi Tai know? Ayo, Yes! Groups of heroes gathered on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge to treat my illness. They must've done it in respect

to Yingying. These two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" knows about it, why wouldn't Dingxian Shi Tai know?" As he thought of this matter, his face turned red with embarrassment.

Zheng E went on, "Martial uncle Abbess also said that it's best not to do this by force. Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai have already gone ahead to Shaolin Temple to meet Great Master Fangzheng to request for her release. She asked that big brother Linghu lead us to go to Shaolin."

When Linghu Chong heard this, he felt dumbfounded and speechless. He lifted his eyes towards the middle of the river and saw a small boat with a small white sail cruising to the north. He felt appreciative towards them but he also felt ashamed. "These two Shi Tai are learned and virtuous Buddhists with high positions in Wulin. Yet, they're willing to go by themselves to ask for Shaolin's compassion. This is probably the best way. Compared to me, an unrestrained, improper, and nameless person of Wulin, their reputations are a hundred times better. It's most likely that when Abbott Fangzheng saw the two Shi Tai, he would have to consider their reputations and agree to release Yingying."

As he thought of this, he felt relieved. He turned his head around to look at those two, Qi and Yi, person who are still immersed in the oil baskets as they were afraid to climb out. He saw that these two were enthusiastic in saving Yingying so he felt that he had wronged them and felt quite sorry for them. He went up to them and cupped his hands. He solemnly offered, "I was being rude before and offended the two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" heroes from the White Flood Dragon Clan not knowing your reasons. Please forgive me."

Those two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" were greatly surprised as they saw him turned respectful towards them so suddenly. They hastily returned his propriety and also cupped their fists. In their haste, the vegetable oil splashed everywhere and some was actually splashed on Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong smiled and nodded his head.

He turned towards Yilin and Zheng E saying, "Let's go!" and returned to their boat. Heng-Shan School's other disciples unexpectedly didn't say anything when they got back. Even Yihe

and Qin Juan, who were usually curious, didn't ask him anything. It was because Dingxian Shi Tai had ordered them not to ask questions to save Linghu Chong from embarrassment. Linghu Chong appreciated this inwardly but he saw shadows of a smile on a few of the female disciples. Unavoidably, he now found himself in a difficult situation. He thought, "They must be thinking that Yingying is my sweetheart. Actually, there's nothing between Yingying and me. But since they're not asking me anything, how do I explain?" When he saw Qin Juan's bright and cunning eyes smiling at him, he couldn't endure it anymore and said, "It's not like that at all. Don't... don't let your imagination run wild."

Qin Juan giggled, "What am I imagining?"

Linghu Chong blushed, "I've already guessed it."

Qin Juan teased him, "Guess what?"

But Linghu Chong didn't answer her. Yihe reproached, "Martial sister Qin, don't say it anymore. Have you forgotten Martial uncle Abbess' order?"

Qin Juan pursed her lips holding back her laugh, "Yes, yes, I didn't forget."

Linghu Chong turned his head away to avoid her eyes only to see Yilin sitting alone in the boat's cabin. She was looking pale and her expression was indifferent. He felt anxious, "What is she thinking? What did I say to upset her?"

He was startled when he suddenly remembered that day outside Hengshan. He recalled her expression while she was running and carrying him until they reached the wilderness. At that time, she was deeply troubled and excited, unlike her very indifferent expression right now. Why? Why?

Yihe suddenly said, "Martial brother Linghu!" But Linghu Chong didn't hear her so he didn't answer her. Yihe called out louder, "Martial brother Linghu!"

Linghu Chong was startled and turned his head around, "Hmm, what?"

Yihe said, "Martial uncle Abbess also said that we should listen to Martial brother Linghu's plan whether we should go by road or boat tomorrow."

Linghu Chong actually wanted to go by land to learn about Yingying. But looking from the corner of his eyes, he saw tears flowing down Yilin's cheeks looking very pitiful. So he decided, "Martial uncle Abbess told us to just go slowly so we'll just travel in this boat then. I don't think those people from White Flood Dragon Clan would dare to bother us."

Qin Juan giggled, "You're not worried?" Linghu Chong blushed and didn't answer her.

Yihe shouted, "Martial sister Qin, you're just like a child, can you stop talking?"

Qin Juan giggled, "I can! Why can't I? Amitufo, I feel worried."

At dawnbreak, the boat sailed westward and Linghu Chong ordered it to stay close to the shore to protect against a potential White Flood Dragon Clan's attack. But everything was quiet as they entered Hubei's border. These last few days, Linghu Chong didn't chit chat much with Heng-Shan School's disciples. Every night when they dropped anchor, he went ashore by himself to drink wine until he got drunk.

That day, the boat went pass Xiakou and turned north going to the Hanshui River. At night, they stopped at the dock of a small town. He again went ashore and drank wine at a small store. After a few bowls of wine, he suddenly thought, "I wonder how little martial sister's injuries are? Martial sisters Yizhen and Yiling delivered Heng-Shan School's medicine to them. So her injuries should be healed by now. I wonder if martial brother Lin has recovered from his injuries? If martial brother Lin's injuries didn't get better, how would she react?" As he thought till here, he was startled, "Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong, you're such a contemptible person! Even though you're hoping that little martial sister would recover, but inside you're also hoping that martial brother Lin would die. Even if martial brother Lin is dead, little martial sister still wouldn't marry you."

He was feeling bored and after he finished three bowls of wine, he again thought, "I don't know who killed Lao Denuo and eighth martial brother? Why did that person also want to harm martial brother Lin? I wonder how Master and Master-wife are doing recently?"

He picked up another bowl of wine and grabbed some salty peanuts to eat. He suddenly heard someone sighing behind him and said, "Ai! All the males in this world have no feeling at all."

Linghu Chong turned his head around to see who spoke those words. Under the candlelight, beside himself in that small store, there was another person crouching beside a table in the corner. On top of the table were also a wine pot and a wine cup. That person's gown was ragged and he looked shabby. He didn't look like an educated or elegant person. So Linghu Chong ceased paying any attention to him and continued to drink another bowl of wine. He then heard that voice spoke behind him again, "A person has been confined in a sunless place because of you but you're spending every single day together with those girls. Young ladies, bald nuns, old grandmas, they're all together with you. Ai, what a shame, what a shame." Linghu Chong knew that this ragged person was talking about him but he didn't turn around. He thought, "Who's this person? He said that a person has been confined in a sunless place because of me. Is he talking about Yingying? Why was she confined because of me?"

He again heard that person said, "Even people who have no connection to this thing are saying that they want to sacrifice themselves to help her. Everyone wants to be the alliance chief. The person hasn't been rescued yet but there's already fierce fighting inside the group. Ai, old person has never seen this kind of matter in Jianghu before."

Linghu Chong picked his wine bowl up and went over to sit opposite that person, "There are a lot of matters that are not clear to me. Old chap please teach me what to do."

That person still lay prostrated on the table. Without raising his head, he said, "Ai, how much is because of a weakness for women, how much is sin? Heng-Shan School's ladies and nuns will be in real trouble because of this."

Linghu Chong was even more startled that he quickly stood up and saluted earnestly. "Linghu Chong pays his respect to senior. Please bestow your guidance."

Standing there, he suddenly saw a very old, deep yellow-coloured huqin on the chair. A thought flashed in his mind and he realized who this person was. He immediately paid respect to



him, "Junior Linghu Chong is lucky to have met martial uncle Mo from Hengshan School. Sorry for my inappropriateness."

That person lifted his head and his bright eyes swept across Linghu Chong's face. It was really Hengshan School's "Xiao Xiang Night Rain" Mo Da. He uttered an "hng" before saying, "You called me martial uncle. You flatter me. Hero Linghu, these last few days you've been really happy!"

Linghu Chong bowed, "Martial uncle Mo is wise. Disciple received martial uncle Dingxian's order to accompany Heng-Shan School's martial sisters to go to Shaolin. Although disciple is ignorant, I don't dare to be inappropriate with martial sisters from Heng-Shan School."

Mr. Mo Da sighed, "Please sit! Ai, how could you not know that the rumours being spoken by all these people in Jianghu can even melt metal?"

Linghu Chong smiled bitterly, "Junior's behaviour was imprudent and I didn't check myself. I can't even show my face in front of my own school. But I don't think we should care too much about these idle talks in Jianghu."

Mr. Mo Da laughed coldly, "Your name is already dragged through the mud, who would pay any attention to you? But Heng-Shan School's hundreds of years of reputation will be ruined by your conduct. This does not move you at all? There are many talks in Jianghu about how you're an adult male mixing with all the ladies and nuns from Heng-Shan School. So many of their names are damaged by you, even... those two very disciplined old Shi Tai are being laughed at. This... this won't do at all."

Linghu Chong retreated two steps and grasped his sword handle, "I don't know who dare to spread these rumours and say all these shameless words. Martial uncle Mo, please tell me."

"You want to kill them? The number of people who says this in Jianghu is around eight thousands. You want to kill them all? Hng, everyone is envious of your luck in love, what's not good about that?" Mr. Mo Da said.

Linghu Chong dejectedly sat down and thought, "Whenever I do things, I never thought about the past or the future but I only ask myself to have a clear conscience. But I never thought that I

would implicate everyone from Heng-Shan School. How... how can this be good?"

Mr. Mo Da sighed and warmly said, "For the last five days, I've been prying into your boats every night..." Linghu Chong let out an "ah" and thought, "Martial uncle Mo has been prying into our boats for five nights already but I didn't even notice him. I'm really incompetent."

Mr. Mo Da went on, "I saw you slept on the stern of the boat every night, you don't even chat with any of them. Your conduct is irreproachable with these Heng-Shan School's female disciples. Brother Linghu, you're not only not a loafer, but you're actually a real gentleman. Even though the boat is full of young nuns and pretty maidens, you never showed any interest in them. Not even one night, but for tens of nights you didn't show any interest. Your type of person, a gentleman, is really rare nowadays. I, Mo Da, really admire you." He raised his right thumbs up praising him. He then slammed his fist down, "Come, come, come! I, Mo Da, am saluting you." He picked up the wine pot and poured wine for them.

Linghu Chong said, "Martial uncle Mo's words scares nephew here. Little nephew's conduct is mostly improper; that's why I wasn't tolerated in my own school. But these Heng-Shan School's martial sisters who I'm traveling with, why would I dare to offend them?"

Mr. Mo Da laughed a few times before answering, "To be frank, this is actually the true colours of males. If I, Mo Da, were still in my twenties and had to accompany all these ladies every night, I wouldn't be able to follow your example in maintaining my moral integrity. This is rare, very rare! Come, bottoms up!" The two of them lifted their wine bowls and gulped them down. Then they laughed together.

Linghu Chong saw that Mr. Mo Da's appearance was unrestrained and his clothing and personal adornments were poor. He didn't look like an earth-shattering figure of a school leader in Jianghu. But as his eyes swept across, it was sharp as a knife-edge. But this fierce look disappeared immediately and he again became a sleepy old man. Linghu Chong thought, "Heng-Shan's leader Dingxian Shi Tai is kind and gentle. Taishan's

leader Priest Tianmen is dignified and sincere. Songshan's leader Zuo Lengchan is like a dangerous bird of prey. My respected master is a refined gentleman. Martial uncle Mo's appearance, on the other hand, is common and humble, just like any other ordinary person. However, within the five mountains sword schools' five leaders, he's actually the wisest one. I, Linghu Chong, am only a crude-fellow; compared to them I still lack by a long distance."

Mr. Mo Da said, "When I was in Hunan, I heard about you mixing together with the nuns and ladies from the Heng-Shan School. I was really surprised. I wondered how Dingxian Shi Tai could allow this matter to arise from her school? Later, I found out your whereabouts from the White Flood Dragon Clan and caught up with you. Brother Linghu, when you made that disturbance in Hengshan's Jade House, at that time I, Mo Da, firmly believed that you were a frivolous young man. Later, after you helped my martial brother Liu Zhengfeng, I held a good opinion of you. I wanted to catch up to give you some advice. Who would've thought that I would meet a hero of this generation. Unexpectedly, brother, you're such a great young hero. Very good, very good! Come, come, come! We'll drink three cups!"

He then called out to the shop servant to add more wine to drink with Linghu Chong. After a few bowls of wine, a sad and poor looking Mr. Mo Da suddenly became cheerful and energetic as he continuously called for more wine. But his tolerance for wine was far less than Linghu Chong. After a few more bowls, his face had become bright scarlet.

"Brother Linghu, I know that you really like to drink wine. Mo Da didn't consider my own position and accompanied you to drink many bowls of wine already. Hey, hey, in Wulin, Mo Da hasn't accompanied many people to drink wine. That day at a meeting in Songshan, there was this Songyang Palm Fei Bin. This person was really bossy and arrogant, the more Mo Da looked at him, the more I didn't like him. So I didn't even drink a drop of wine. The words coming out of his mouth were also rude. Damn it, don't you think he's annoying?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Yes, this kind of person overrates his own ability and his conduct's really overbearing. At the end, he didn't have a good fate."

"Later, this person just suddenly disappeared. His whereabouts is also unclear and no one knows where he's gone. This is really strange," Mr. Mo Da said.

Linghu Chong wondered about that day outside the walls of Hengshan city. He clearly saw Mr. Mo Da used his wonderfully divine sword art to kill Fei Bin then and he was also sure that Mr. Mo Da saw him there witnessing the whole event. But how come Mr. Mo was saying he didn't know what happened to Fei Bin? Linghu Chong didn't want to appear as if he knew something about it so he said, "Songshan School has no other people who they can rely on. So probably this Fei Bin is holed up somewhere in a cave on Songshan mountain diligently practising his sword art."

Mr. Mo Da's eyes suddenly flashed with a cunning look. He laughed lightly and slapped the table, "That must be it! If brother didn't mention this, I would've racked my brain trying to figure out where he's gone to and still wouldn't have figured out the reason." He drank a mouthful of wine before asking, "Brother Linghu, why are you really mixing with Heng-Shan School's disciples? Devil Sect's young lady Ren has deep feelings towards you. So you should never disappoint her."

Linghu Chong's face turned red when he heard this. "Martial uncle Mo is wise. Little nephew is already frustrated in love. This matter of male and female, I've long been indifferent to this already." As he thought of his little martial sister, Yue Lingshan, his heart turned sour and his eyes couldn't help but turn red. Suddenly, he laughed loudly and in a clear voice said, "Little nephew is already disillusioned with this mortal world and wanted to become a monk. But I'm afraid that the regulations for the monks are too strict. Like can't drink wine. So I didn't go and become a monk. Haha, haha!" Even though he was laughing loudly, it sounded mournful.

After a while, he related the story of how he met Dingjing, Dingxian, and Dingyi Shi Tai and how he helped them. He just

thoughtlessly described every event while playing down his role in it.

Mr. Mo Da calmly listened to his story till the end. He then just dumbly stared at the wine pot for a long time before saying, "Zuo Lengchan's desire is to annex the other four schools into his own to make one big school. This one big school would then be able to match the two big schools of Shaolin and Wudang and stand as their equal. He hatched this secret plot a long time ago. Although he's concealed it deeply, I've seen clues of it for a long time now. His granny, he didn't allow my martial brother Liu to wash his hand and also helped the sword branch of Huashan School to challenge and usurp Mr. Yue's leadership. All these things happened because of this reason. But I never thought that he would be so rash as to brazenly attack Heng-Shan School."

Linghu Chong said, "He didn't attack openly with boldness. Originally, he pretended to be from the Devil Sect to force Heng-Shan School to have no other alternative but to agree to combine their schools."

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head agreeing with him, "Correct. The next step he'll be taking must be to deal with Taishan School's Priest Tianmen. Hng, even though Devil Sect is vicious, they're not necessarily more vicious than Zuo Lengchan. Brother Linghu, you're no longer in Huashan School, you're free like the cloud and cranes in the field. You're unrestrained. So you don't need to care about this orthodox school and Devil Sect matters anymore. I advise you, don't become a monk and also don't grieve because of this. Go and rescue that young lady Ren out of Shaolin and marry her. Even if other people don't want to come and drink your celebration wine, I, Mo Da, will come and drink three cups. Damn Zho Lengchan! Does he think we're afraid of him?"

Mr. Mo sometimes talked in a refined manner but sometimes he talked really vulgarly. He didn't look like a leader of a school at all.

Linghu Chong thought, "He thinks that I'm discouraged about love because of Yingying. But it's not good talking to him about the matter of little martial sister." He then asked, "Martial uncle Mo, why did the Shaolin School imprison young lady Ren?"

Mr. Mo Da's mouth dropped open. He eyed Linghu Chong intensely with his expression full of amazement, "Why did the Shaolin School imprison young lady Ren? You really don't know, or you already know but you are still asking? Everyone in Jianghu already knows why, you... you... what are you asking for?"

"For the past several months, little nephew was imprisoned by some people and didn't hear of any news from Jianghu. After that young lady Ren killed four disciples of Shaolin School, little nephew was together with her for some time. But I didn't know how we got separated later and how she ended up being captured by Shaolin School?" Linghu Chong explained.

Mr. Mo Da answered, "If that's the case, you really don't know the whole story then. Your body's internal injury was incurable by any medicine. I heard that the unorthodox sects assembled thousands of people on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge to flatter this young lady Ren and to heal your injury. The result is that no one was able to do anything for you, is this right?"

"Right," replied Linghu Chong.

"This whole event shook Jianghu. Everyone was wondering how this kid Linghu Chong got so much good fortune. Unexpectedly, it was because the Dark Wood Cliff's Sacred Lady Miss Ren favours you. So even though your illness couldn't be cured, it wasn't all in vain," Mr. Mo Da said.

"Martial uncle Mo is teasing me," said Linghu Chong while he thought, "Although Old Man and Zhu Qianqiu had good intentions, their method was really crude and they announced this matter to everyone. No wonder Yingying was angry."

"So how did you finally get better? It's Shaolin School's "Tendon Altering Sutra" divine art, wasn't it?" Mr. Mo Da asked.

"It's not. Shaolin School's Abbot Fangzheng was merciful and forgave old animosities. He agreed to impart Shaolin School's unsurpassed internal energy cultivation method to me. It was little nephew who didn't want to join the Shaolin School. This Shaolin's divine martial art wasn't allowed to be imparted to outsiders so I had to disappoint Abbott Fangzheng's kindness," Linghu Chong answered.

"Shaolin School is Wulin's most respected school. At that time, you have already been expelled from the Huashan School,

so it was by chance that you were able to join Shaolin. This is once in a lifetime opportunity. Why didn't you take into consideration about that and about your own life too?" Mr. Mo Da said.

"Little nephew has been with my respected Master and Master-Wife since I was young. Even if my body is grounded till dust, I still hope that someday my respected Master would allow little nephew to correct myself and join the Huashan School again. I didn't want to be greedy to preserve my life and be afraid of death and join another school," Linghu Chong said.

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head, "So that's the reason. In that case, your internal injury was healed by another method."

"Yes! Actually little nephew's internal injury isn't completely healed yet," Linghu Chong answered.

Mr. Mo Da stared at him and said, "Shaolin School never had any relationship with you. Although Buddhist people are merciful, they wouldn't just casually pass on their divine martial art to anyone. When Great Master Fangzheng promised to teach you "Tendon Altering Sutra", you didn't know the reason behind this?"

"Little nephew really don't know. I hope that martial uncle Mo can tell me," Linghu Chong said.

"Alright! Everyone in Jianghu says, that day, Dark Wood Cliff's young lady Ren carried you on her back and went to Shaolin Temple. Once there, she begged to see the Abbott and told him that he must save your life and she would leave herself to the mercy of the Shaolin temple. If they wanted to kill or peel her flesh, she wouldn't object," Mr. Mo Da said.

"Ah!" uttered Linghu Chong as he jumped up and turned over the wine bowls on the table. His whole body was suddenly covered in cold sweat and his limbs were trembling. His voice trembled, "This... this... this..." His mind was confused. He thought back to those days when his body was getting weaker as days passed by. One night, when he was sleeping, he heard Yingying wept sorrowfully. She said, "You're getting thinner every day. I... I..." She was saying this very sincerely and he appreciated her concern. Then he vomited some blood and lost consciousness. When he became clear-headed, he was already

inside the Shaolin temple and Great Master Fangsheng had already passed him countless amount of inner energy to save him. But he didn't know how he ended up in Shaolin or where Yingying had gone. She had actually risked her own life to save his own. He couldn't help as tears filled his eyes and finally flowed down his cheeks.

Mr. Mo Da sighed. "Although this young lady Ren's family background is from the Devil Sect, she treated you with sincerity and passion. From Shaolin School, Xin Guoliang, Yi Guozi, Huang Guobo, and Jueyue had all fallen under her hand. So when she went to Shaolin, she didn't expect to return alive, but in order to save you, she... she disregarded her own life. Seeing this, Great Master Fangzheng didn't want to kill her but he also couldn't just let her go. That's why she was imprisoned inside a cave at the back of the Shaolin temple. This Young lady Ren has many generations of subordinates from various clans. Of course they all wanted to save her. I heard these last few months, Shaolin School hasn't had one day of peace. From the day they captured her till now, some people said more than a hundred people had gone there to rescue her."

Linghu Chong's mood surged when he heard this and he couldn't control it for a long time. As his feelings subsided, he asked, "Martial uncle Mo, you said before everyone was vying for the Chief position and there's already fierce fighting inside the rescue group. How is this matter?"

Mr. Mo Da sighed. "I heard that these people from the unorthodox sects usually just follow young lady Ren's order. Without someone with authority to order them around, they're just madly running and fighting with each other. None of them would submit to anyone. Now they're going to Shaolin temple on a rescue mission. They all know that Shaolin temple is the realm's oldest martial art school and matters would be difficult to handle there. Moreover, if they go there one by one then they know they would never be able to go back out alive. That's why they gathered so many people to form an alliance before going. After this alliance was formed, then there must be a leader. I heard in these last few days, they've been fighting over this leadership position. Several people have died and been injured



and they've lost many people because of this. Brother Linghu, I think you should rush over there and control them. Whatever you say, who would dare to disobey you, haha, haha!"

Mr. Mo Da was laughing happily while Linghu Chong's face turned scarlet red. He knew that what he said was correct, but the alliance would only submit to him because of their respect towards Yingying. Later, when she found out about this, she would surely throw a big tantrum. Suddenly, he thought, "Yingying has very deep feelings towards me but she's very thin-skinned. What I'm afraid most is if people joke at her saying that her love towards me is unrequited and I can't repay her kindness. I must repay her kindness but when news of this spread throughout Jianghu, people will say that Linghu Chong is passionately devoted to her, then she probably don't want to live anymore because of embarrassment. It's best if I just rushed into Shaolin by myself and rescues her. If I couldn't rescue her, then they can just say that I made a disturbance there to beg for alms." At this thought, he said, "Heng-Shan School's Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai already went to Shaolin temple to seek for Abbott Fangzheng's compassion to release Young lady Ren. They're doing this in order to avoid a bloodbath in the Shaolin temple."

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head. "No wonder, no wonder! I found it really strange that Dingxian Shi Tai wasn't worried that you were left alone with her school's young ladies and nuns. So it was because of you that she's going to Shaolin."

Linghu Chong said, "Martial uncle Mo, little nephew now knows about this matter and feels really worried. I wish I could fly to Shaolin temple to see how the two Shi Tai are doing with their request. It's just that Heng-Shan School's martial sisters are all women and I'm worried that they might meet some difficulties en route to Shaolin."

Mr. Mo Da answered, "You can go!"

Linghu Chong happily said, "There's no harm if I go first?"

Mr. Mo Da didn't answer but picked up his huqin instead, and started playing it. Linghu Chong knew the meaning behind his word was that he was going to tend to Heng-Shan School's disciples. Martial uncle Mo's martial art and experience was not

ordinary. No matter whether he was protecting them in secret or not, Heng-Shan School would be safe. He immediately bowed and said, "Thank you for your kindness."

Mr. Mo Da replied, "Five Mountains Sword Schools, same root different branches. Why do you need to thank me for protecting them? If that Young lady Ren found out, I'm afraid she'll drink vinegar because of this."

Linghu Chong said, "Goodbye. Little nephew will bother martial uncle Mo to look after Heng-Shan School's martial sisters then." As he finished saying this, he rushed out of the shop.

He halted a step and looked towards the middle of the river. He saw lights from the windows on the boat spilled over and reflected on the Hanshui River. In the shop behind him, the sound of Mr. Mo Da's huqin rapidly disappeared. He could only hear the calm of the night. It was really peaceful.

# **Chapter 26: Besieging the Temple**

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



**Two days later, the mob arrived at Shaolin Temple on Mount Shaoshi. The mob had grown to the size of over five thousand people. Loud drumbeats from hundreds of huge drums thumped all together with earthshaking power.**

Linghu Chong travelled quickly to the north and reached a large town on a clear and beautiful day. He went into a restaurant in the city. Hubei's most famous pastry was dried bean curd with vegetables and meat wrapped inside a skin made from bean curd powder. It was very tasty. Linghu Chong finished three plates of these before he came out of the shop.

As he stepped out of the shop, he saw a group of people walking towards him. Among them was a short and plump fellow. Surprisingly, he was "Old Ancestor of Yellow River" Old Man. Linghu Chong was really happy to see them and called out loudly, "Old Man! How are you?" Old Man was surprised and looked at him awkwardly. He

hesitated for a moment before he drew out his sabre.

Linghu Chong already took a step forward to welcome them. "Zu Qianqiu..." he had not said anything more when Old Man lifted his sabre and chopped down on him. Even though there was a lot of power in this chop, the accuracy was off as Old Man missed Linghu Chong's shoulder by around a foot. He cried out and chopped down again.

Linghu Chong was frightened and quickly jumped back. "Mr. Old, I'm... I'm Linghu Chong!"

Old Man replied with a shout. "Of course I know you're Linghu Chong. Everyone heard you already. Sacred Lady gave us an order that anyone who meets Linghu Chong must kill him. She will then shower us with gifts for following this order. Everyone understand?"

"We understand." The group of people who were with him replied loudly.

Although they replied Old Man with such conviction, they just looked at each other with awkward expressions on their

faces and no one drew their sabres out. Some people were actually laughing thinking that this was amusing.

Linghu Chong's face turned red thinking about the day Yingying gave that order for Old Man to spread in Jianghu. The order was for them to kill Linghu Chong when they met him. But she actually gave that order because she hoped that Linghu Chong would never leave her side. It was also to inform the heroes of Jianghu that young lady Ren was

not crazily in love with Linghu Chong but instead hated him to the bone. Later, after so many unforeseen events, he had completely forgotten about this order. At this time, after hearing what Old Man said, he realised that her order had not been cancelled yet.

When Old Man informed them of Sacred Lady's order, the people in the group did not believe him. In order to save Linghu Chong's life, she had willingly gone to Shaolin to sacrifice her life. At that time, the news of the incident in which she killed four secular disciples of Shaolin temple had already spread and created a sensation in Jianghu. Everybody praised her bravery for going to Shaolin, but they also found it really funny and also thought that this young lady wanted to show Shaolin that she was better than them by going there. It was clear that she loved Linghu Chong deeply because she was willing to exchange her own life to save him. It was also clear that she didn't

want to admit to her feelings for him. But it was unavoidable that everyone else understood her feelings for him.

Concerning this matter, Yingying's subordinates from the unorthodox sects were aware of it extensively. But the orthodox schools also knew some of the details. In everyday chats, this matter often became a laughingstock. So when the people in this group suddenly saw Linghu Chong, they were pleasantly surprised but at the same time they also didn't know what to do.

Old Man said, "Master Linghu, Sacred Lady ordered us to kill you. But your martial art is too high, just then my sabre didn't manage to chop you. Please show mercy and don't take my life. Friends, everyone already saw that it's not that we didn't want to kill Master Linghu, but it's just that we couldn't kill him. Old Man couldn't do it, so of course none of you could do it either. Isn't that right?"

Everyone erupted in laughter and shouted, "Right!" One person shouted, "Just now, we've all fought with all our hearts until both parties are so tired that we couldn't even kill each other. It's better if we just stop fighting. Everyone, let's go and fight in drinking wine. If there's a hero here who can make Master Linghu dead drunk then later when we meet Sacred Lady, we'll tell her that we managed to kill him."

Everyone laughed madly holding their stomachs while saying, "Wonderful, wonderful!"

Another person laughingly said, "Sacred Lady wants us to kill Master Linghu, but she didn't say that we have to use swords to do it. So it makes sense to use beautiful wine to make him dead drunk. This can be called using wisdom to subdue the enemy instead of brawn."

Cheering loudly, they crowded around Linghu Chong and took him to the biggest wine shop in the city. There were more than forty people in the group and they filled up six tables in that shop. A few of them knocked on the benches calling out, "Bring out the wine!" Once Linghu Chong sat down, he asked, "How is Sacred Lady? I'm worried to death." When that group of people heard him worrying about Yingying, they

were all really happy.

"Everybody decided already that on the fifteenth of the twelfth month, we're all going to the Shaolin temple to get Sacred Lady out of there. In the last few days, the people in the alliance had been fighting endlessly to decide who's going to be the leader and had injured each other. It's good that Master Linghu already arrived. If this leadership isn't

taken by you, then who else can do it? If another person were to lead this alliance, later, when we got Sacred Lady out of the temple, she definitely won't be happy," Old Man told him.

A white-bearded old fellow laughed, "Yeah! Master Linghu must be the Chief of this alliance. Even if we later meet with difficulties and were unable to get Sacred Lady out, when she heard news of you leading us, she'll still be extremely happy. This position of Chief is a match made in heavens for you and only Master Linghu can take it."

"This matter of Chief is not important. The most important thing is to rescue Sacred Lady out of the temple. Even if I died a cruel death in doing so, I'm still willing to do it," Linghu Chong said.

He didn't just say these words thoughtlessly. He really appreciated Yingying's sacrificing her own life for him. Even if he had to die for Yingying, he wouldn't have given much thought to it. However, if it were just any other day, even though he still would've thought the same thing in his heart, he wouldn't have said this publicly. Now, this speech of risking death was said with passion and righteousness, it warned everyone not to make fun of Yingying.

When they heard him said this, they were all reassured of him. They felt that Sacred Lady's judgement was right about this person. That white-bearded person said, "So Master Linghu is actually a passionate and righteous hero. If that false rumour in Jianghu were true that Master Linghu doesn't care about anyone but himself, then everyone

here would've turned cold towards you."

Linghu Chong said, "For the last few months, I was imprisoned and didn't know anything about the things happening in Jianghu. But night and day, I was thinking about Sacred Lady until all my hair turned white. Come, come, come! Let me salute my fellow friends with a cup. Thank you everyone for striving for Sacred Lady." Saying this, he



stood up and lifted his cup to drink and was followed by the others.

"Mr. Old, you said that many friends are fighting for the Chief position and injuring each other needlessly. It's still not too late for us to go there immediately and advise them to stop," Linghu Chong said.

"True. Zu Qianqiu and Night Cat already went. We should go catch up with them," Old Man said.

"Where are they?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Everyone's gathering at the Yellow Keep Plain," Old Man said.

"Yellow Keep Plain?" Linghu Chong queried.

"It's west of Xiang Yang in the middle of Mountain Jing," That white-bearded old man said.

"Let's eat and drink quickly then we'll go to Yellow Keep Plain. We've already fought for three days and three nights drinking wine up till now and everyone had already thought of every means, but no one's been able to make Linghu Chong dead drunk. Later, when everyone meets Sacred Lady, you can confess this to her," Linghu Chong said.

They all laughed and said, "Master Linghu wine's capacity is like an ocean. Even if we drink for three days and three nights, we're afraid that we won't be able to keep up."

Walking side by side with Old Man, Linghu Chong asked, "How's your daughter's illness? Is she much better now?"

Old Man replied, "Master, your heart is concerned about a lot of matters. Although she's not better, I'm happy that she also hasn't gotten any worse."

Linghu Chong had been holding a question in his heart since the beginning. Seeing the people behind him were tens of feet away, he asked, "A lot of friends said that Sacred Lady has been benevolent to everybody. I don't understand how she could have been kind to so many people in Jianghu when she is still so very young."

"Master really doesn't know the reason?" Old Man asked.

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I don't know."

"Master isn't an outsider so we don't need to conceal it from you. But everyone has sworn an oath to Sacred Lady not to divulge this secret. Master, please forgive our sin," Old Man said.

Linghu Chong nodded, "Is it because it's inconvenient to say or is it better not to say it?"

Old Man said, "Leave it to Sacred Lady to personally tell master, won't that be much better?"

Linghu Chong said, "The earlier the day I get to see her in person the better."

On the road, they met two more groups of people going to Yellow Keep Plain. When combined, the three groups consisted of more than a hundred people.

They arrived at Yellow Keep Plain really late at night and saw a gathering at the west side of the plain. They were still a li away from the gathering but the sounds of people calling out could already be heard. Linghu Chong quickened his steps towards the crowd. Under the moonlight, he could see a very large crowd surrounding an empty ground. He guessed there were more than one thousand people gathering around. He heard a person shouting, "Chief, Chief, naturally there's only one person who becomes Chief. With six of you guys, how do you all become Chief?"

Another person answered, "The six of us can be considered as one, and one as six. If you obey our six brothers' orders then we six brothers are Chief. You talk too much; we'll tear you into four pieces first before we talk further."

Linghu Chong didn't need to see who was talking; he already knew that it was one of the Peach Valley Six Fairies. But each of their voices sounded almost the same so he couldn't tell which one it was. Everyone was frightened by what that Peach Valley Fairy said and didn't dare to shout anymore. However, it was apparent that the crowd refused to accept the Peach Valley Six Fairies' words as final. Some people at the outer edge of the crowd were still scolding,

while others were laughing loudly unseen, and some were throwing rocks around. It was total chaos.

"Who's throwing rocks at old man?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy loudly shouted.

"Your old man," Someone answered from the darkness.

"What? If you're my brother's old man, then you're my old man too?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy indignantly asked.

Another person said, "That's not necessarily true." Several hundred people erupted in laughter when they heard this.

"Why not necessarily true?" Peachtree Flower Fairy was confused.

"I also don't know why. I only have one son," Another person chimed in.

"You only have one son, what's that got to do with us?" Peachtree Root Fairy questioned.

Another person with a rough voice laughed loudly, "Got nothing to do with you. But probably got something to do with your brothers."

"Has it got to anything do with me then?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy inquired.

One of the earlier person laughed, "Well, you have to look whether your appearance is similar to them or not."

"Do you think my appearance is somewhat similar? Come out and take a look," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

"What's there to look at? Look at it yourself in the mirror," That person laughed.

Suddenly, four shadows moved extremely fast. They pushed forward and grabbed that person out. That person was tall and big. He probably weighed around 200 catties. The Peach Valley Six Fairies had caught four of his limbs but they didn't tear him apart. The four fairies looked at his face under the moonlight. Then Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "Doesn't look like me. How can I look that ugly? Number three, I'm afraid he looks a bit like you."

"Pei, am I uglier than you? All the realm's heroes are here, let's ask them to compare," Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

The people in the crowd had seen earlier that the Peach Valley Six Fairies weren't pleasant to look at with weird body shapes and ugly faces. If they had to pick which one was the best looking then that wouldn't be an easy task at all. Right now, they were looking at that big man seized in the hands of four of the fairies. At any

moment, he could be torn to four pieces. Everyone was feeling apprehensive and no one dared to laugh.

Linghu Chong was aware of the temperaments of the Peach Valley Six Fairies. If something went slightly wrong, then this big man would be torn to pieces. He called out clearly, "Peach Valley Six Fairies, how about if you let Linghu Chong appraise you?" As he said this, he slowly stepped out from the crowd.

When they heard the name "Linghu Chong", it created a sensation throughout the crowd. More than a thousand pair of eyes were now trained on him. But Linghu Chong didn't look away from the Peach Valley Six Fairies afraid that they might get excited and rip that big man apart. He said, "Put this friend down first then I'll have a look at you." The four fairies immediately put the big man down.

This man's stature was very grand and when he stood up on the ground, he looked like an iron pagoda. He had just escaped from death and was still scared stiff. His face was grey like a corpse and his whole body was trembling. He knew that trembling like that was not appropriate for a hero, but his body was trembling by itself and he couldn't stop it from shaking. He wanted to say a few words to save his face but he only managed to tremble, "I... I... I..."

Linghu Chong saw him scared to death but still looking handsome. He said to the Peach Valley Six Fairies, "Six Peachtree brothers, you don't look like this friend at all. Compared to him, you're even more handsome. Peachtree

Root Fairy's bones are wonderful, Peachtree Trunk Fairy's stature is big and tall, Peachtree Branch Fairy's limbs are slender, Peachtree Leaf Fairy's eyebrows are distinct and eyes are elegant, Peachtree Flower Fairy's... his... his eyes are like the stars, and Peachtree Fruit Fairy is full of vigour. Whoever meets any of you, he will promptly recognise your six righteous and heroic faces, young... middle-aged and handsome."

The crowd heard this and burst into laughter, but the Peach Valley Six Fairies were very happy. Old Man had already experienced suffering under the hands of the Peach Valley Six Fairies before, so he knew they were not to be trifled with. He addressed the crowd, "In my opinion, looking around at all the heroes here, you all have many

types of good martial arts. But speaking of facial appearances, no one can compare with the Peach Valley Six Fairies."

After hearing this, the crowd started to call out. Someone hollered, "Not only handsome but also elegant. No one in the world can come close to them."

Another one called out, "When Pan An retreated, Song Yu also retreated."

And another one chimed in, "In Wulin, the number one to number six most handsome men are these six people. Master Linghu is number seven at most."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies grinned from ear to ear thinking that those people were actually praising them. They didn't realise that they were actually being teased. Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "My mum used to say that the six of us are stinking ugly. So she was wrong." Another person laughed, "Of course she's wrong. There are only six of you, how do you turn into stinking ugly?"<sup>26</sup>

Another person softly said, "Add into that their dad and mum..." but before he managed to finish this sentence, the people around him quickly covered up his mouth.

Old Man said in a loud voice, "Friends, we have some luck tonight. Master Linghu was just about to single-handedly break through Shaolin temple and get Sacred Lady out. But he met us on the way and heard that everyone is here so he came to talk with us. He said their appearances are handsome, naturally we'll regard Peach Valley Six Fairies..." When the crowd heard this, they burst into laughter again.

Old Man waved his hand telling them to stop but among the laughter, someone said, "Breaking through Shaolin temple to save Sacred Lady is a big matter. What does it have to do with facial appearances? In my opinion, we should just offer Master Linghu the Chief position and ask him to preside over all matters and give out orders. Everyone will then respectfully comply with his orders. What does everyone think of this?"

Everyone in the crowd knew that Sacred Lady was trapped in Shaolin because of Linghu Chong. They also knew that Linghu Chong's martial art was outstanding. That day in Henan, he fought together with Xiang Wentian against heroes from all paths. That incident created a sensation in Jianghu. But even if he was weak, they would still give him the position of chief in respect to Sacred Lady. When they heard what Old Man and the other person said, they were all happy and started to cheer and applaud. Peachtree Flower Fairy suddenly said awkwardly, "After we rescued young lady Ren out of the temple, will she become Linghu Chong's wife?"

All of the people here revered young lady Ren but they also thought what Peachtree Flower Fairy said wasn't wrong. But they would never have dared to publicly say this. Linghu Chong was completely embarrassed and stayed silent. Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "He wants a wife and also wants to become Chief. That's too nice of him. We'll help him rescue his wife, but it's better if the position of Chief is occupied by us, six brothers." Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Yeah! Only if his

skill is better than us then we don't have to discuss this matter anymore."

Suddenly, Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, and Peachtree Fruit Fairies moved together. They grabbed Linghu Chong's four limbs and lifted him up in the air. They moved really fast and there was no hint that they were going to do this so it was too late for Linghu Chong to avoid it.

The crowd was frightened to see this and they called out together, "Don't do that! Let go of him!"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy laughed, "Don't worry everyone. We're not going to hurt him. We're just going to make him promise to make us Chief..."

He had not finished speaking when Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, and Peachtree Fruit Fairies suddenly shouted strangely and tossed Linghu Chong away. They blurted out, "You... why are you using such a demonical method?"

When Linghu Chong's four limbs were grabbed by these four idiots, he was really afraid that they would really rip him apart so he immediately used his Art of Essence Absorbing. The four Peachtree Fairies felt their internal energy flowing out of their palms. When they tried to use their inner energy to resist the flow, it actually poured out even faster. So they were frightened and quickly let go of him. Linghu Chong somersaulted and landed steadily on his feet.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy hastily asked, "What?"

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered together, "This... this Linghu Chong's martial art is really weird. We can't hold on to him."

"It's not that we can't hold on to him. Just that suddenly, we don't want to hold on to him anymore," Peachtree Trunk Fairy corrected.

The people in the crowd cheered loudly and said, "Peach Valley Six Fairies, do you submit now?"

"Linghu Chong is our six brothers' good friend. Linghu Chong is the same as Peach Valley Six Fairies. Peach Valley Six Fairies is the same as Linghu Chong. If Linghu Chong becomes Chief then it'll be just like the Peach Valley Six Fairies becoming Chief. So what's there not to submit to?" Peachtree Root Fairy said.

"In the whole world, how can you not submit to yourself? Your question is too stupid," Peachtree Fruit Fairy added.

When the crowd looked at the expressions of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, they guessed that the Peach Valley Six Fairies had suffered a loss when they grabbed Linghu Chong but they were now just saving face and didn't want to acknowledge it. Although the crowd didn't really understand the reason, they started cheering and laughing anyway.

Linghu Chong said, "Friends, this time we're going to meet the Sacred Lady and also rescue our many friends who have been trapped in Shaolin temple. Shaolin temple is Wulin's most respected place and their 72 unique skills have long been famous for several hundred years. Any sect alone would not be able to contend against them, but we'll just overwhelm them with number since we have over a thousand heroes here

and more good men to come. Although our martial art is inferior compared to Shaolin's monks and their secular disciples, we'll surely win by fighting them ten to one."

Everyone cheered, "Right, right! Is it really true that Shaolin's monks have three heads and six arms?"

Linghu Chong continued, "However, even though Shaolin's Great Masters have imprisoned Sacred Lady, they haven't treated her badly. The temple's Great Masters are learned and righteous eminent monks. They are also merciful and people respect them for their virtues. So even if we destroy Shaolin temple, I'm afraid Jianghu's heroes will say that we've won only by relying on our sheer number, which is not the



behaviour of heroes. That's why in my opinion, we should talk respectfully with them first before fighting then we can say that we've yielded a step to Shaolin temple. This way, we would put Sacred Lady and our other friends out of danger. We would also avoid a big battle which is a good thing."

"Master Linghu's words suit well with me. If we're really going to fight, then both sides will suffer many deaths and injuries," Zu Qianqiu said.

"But Master Linghu's words don't suit me. If both parties don't fight then there won't be many deaths and injuries on both sides. Where's the fun then?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

"We already agreed that Master Linghu is Chief. So everyone must listen to his order," Zu Qianqiu said.

"Correct, you should let us six brothers give orders out," Peachtree Root Fairy said.

The crowd heard those six brothers creating a scene and obstructing the real issues being discussed. They were mad and a lot of people grasped the handles of their swords and sabres already waiting for Linghu Chong's order. Once the order was given, they would immediately chop these six brothers into pieces. Although the six brothers' martial arts were higher, they would never be able to continuously block the attacks from dozens of people.

Zu Qianqiu said, "What does a Chief do? Naturally they give orders out. If he doesn't give orders out then how can he still be called Chief? Of course this character "zhu" means that he has to give out orders."[27](#)

"Since that's the case, just call him "meng" only without the "zhu"," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy shook his head, "Calling him "meng" only is very difficult."

"In my esteemed opinion, since calling him "meng" only is difficult, why don't we tear apart this character and we can call him "ming xue"!" Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"Wrong, wrong! When you tear open the character "meng", the character at the bottom, less a "pie", isn't the character "xue". So what character is that?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies didn't know the character "min" was from the word "qi min" (Household utensils). Everyone in the crowd didn't want to follow their shameful behaviour so they didn't say anything.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "It may less a 'bit', it's still 'xue'. It's best if I cut you to show you, if I cut you deeply then a lot of blood will come out. So it's still blood. If I take into consideration the feelings between us and cut you lightly then not much blood will come out. Although it's less, it's still blood."[28](#)

Peachtree Branch Fairy indignantly said, "If you're giving me a cut then of course it's going to be light. There's no need to take into consideration the feelings between us. Why do you want to give me a cut?"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "My "ke" doesn't have cut. My hand also doesn't have a sabre."[29](#)

Peachtree Flower Fairy asked, "Then what happened if your hand has a sabre?"

The crowd heard them talking even more nonsense as they talked more and they couldn't take it anymore, "Be quiet! Everyone's trying to listen to Chief's order."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "He already finished giving his order, why must we be quiet?"

Linghu Chong raised his voice, "Friends, the fifteenth of the twelfth is still seventeen days away. Everyone, let's move there slowly. By the time we got to Songshan, it'd be around that date already. This time, we're not going in secret so we'll be going with big banners and beating on drums. Tomorrow, we'll buy cloths to make big banners and write "World's Heroes Going to Shaolin Temple to Meet Sacred Lady". We'll also buy some leather drums to beat on when we're moving.

When the Shaolin's monks and secular disciples hear this, they'll feel discouraged before fighting."

Most of these unorthodox people were actually good people. So when they heard of his plan, they were extremely happy and started to cheer loudly shaking the whole valley. Among them there were also a number of experienced and steady older people who didn't express their opinion. But when they heard the crowd feeling pleased, they just smiled. At dawn, Linghu Chong asked Zu Qianqiu, Ji Wushi, and Old Man to make the banners and buy some leather drums. At noon, they finished writing those words on the banner and had bought a few leather drums.

Linghu Chong said, "We'll start our journey now. Along the road, we'll be passing a lot of towns so we'll just keep buying more stocks there."

The crowd were beating on the drums and roaring battle cries as they moved north in squadrons. Linghu Chong had seen how Heng-Shan School's disciples were ambushed at the Xianxia mountain range. After some discussion, he dispatched seven sects. Two sects were sent to the front to act as sentries, two sects were protecting the left, two sects were protecting the right, and the other one stayed behind to help wherever needed while the rest of the people moved with the main group. He also dispatched Hanshui River's Divine Crow Clan to act as messengers. Divine Crow Clan was a local clan and their circle of influence extended from Hubei at the north down to Henan at the south. If there were the slightest sign of trouble, they would know of it as soon as possible. As he assigned orders, besides the Peach Valley Six Fairies, everyone obeyed his orders completely.

In the few days that they were travelling, heroes continuously joined their group. They also had more banners and more drums as they went. Along with the sounds of drums, it was very noisy with two thousands people shouting along as they went towards Shaolin.

When they arrived at the foot of Mount Wudang, Linghu Chong said, "Wudang School is Wulin's second biggest school. The name of their school flourishes and they're second only to Shaolin. Even though we're going to rescue Sacred Lady from Shaolin School, we don't want to offend Shaolin. Naturally, we don't want to offend Wudang School either. So we'll avoid the main road to go across this area to show the leader of Wudang School some respect and to show them that we're not attacking their school. What does everyone think of this?"

"Whatever Master Linghu says, we'll do it. We'll be satisfied so long as we are able to rescue the Sacred Lady. So there's no need to do other irrelevant things or make powerful enemies with anyone else. What's the use of levelling the Wudang School but not being able to rescue Sacred Lady?" Old Man said.

Linghu Chong said, "That's very good then! Please pass the order to stop the drums and lower the banners. We're turning to the east." In a short moment, everyone started to go east.

As they were travelling that day, they saw a person riding a donkey coming towards them. Following behind him were two farmers each carrying a basket on a pole on his shoulder. One was carrying vegetables and the other one was carrying some firewood. The old person riding the donkey had a bent back and was coughing incessantly. The clothes he was wearing was full of patches. When the crowd saw this trio coming towards them without making way, a lot of them put their hands on the handles of their weapons. Along the road, they had been making a lot of noise and whenever any pedestrian saw them, they immediately went to one side of the road letting them pass. But these three people turned a blind eye to them and just kept on coming towards the group.

Peachtree Root Fairy scolded, "What are you doing?" as he pushed the donkey with his hand. The donkey neighed

once before dropping down as its leg was broken. The old person riding the donkey was thrown to the ground and stayed down huffing and puffing. Linghu Chong felt sorry as he stooped down to help the old man get up. "I'm really sorry. Elder, are you hurt?"

That old man was still huffing and puffing, "What... what... what's going on? I'm a poor man..." The two farmers put their loads down and stood in the middle of the road. They put both their hands on their waist and were looking angry.

The person carrying the vegetable pantingly said, "This is the foot of Mount Wudang. Who are you people to daringly hit people around here?"

"The foot of Mount Wudang, what kind of place is that?" Peachtree Root Fairy asked.

That man said, "Everyone at the foot of Mount Wudang knows martial art. You're strangers here. Why do you act recklessly here in the fields at the foot of Mount Wudang and ask for trouble?"

The people in the group saw that these people had yellow faces and were very thin. They were around fifty years old. When that person carrying the vegetable spoke, his breath wasn't strong but he claimed to be capable in martial art so the people in group were laughing loudly at them.

"You also know martial art?" Peachtree Flower Fairy teased.

That man replied, "At the foot of mount Wudang, even a three year old can do shadowboxing, a five year old can already use a sword. What's so rare about that?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy pointed to the person carrying firewood and laughed, "How about him? He also knows martial art?"

The person carrying firewood replied, "I... I... when I was small, I learned martial art for a few months. But I haven't practised it for several years now. This martial art... sigh, they've become rusted now."

"Wudang School's martial art is number one in the world. It only needs to be studied for a few months and you won't be our match," the vegetable-person said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy laughed, "Why don't you do a few movements to give us a look?"

"Show what? You won't be able to understand it anyway," the firewood-person said.

The crowd erupted in laughter and they all said, "We may not understand but we can still look."

The firewood-person said, "Ai, in that case, I'll show you a few moves then. Don't know if I still remember all of them... Lend me a sword." A person came out from the crowd and handed him a sword. The firewood man then went out to the middle of the hardened rice field and started to thrust to the east and slash to the west. After about three or four moves, he suddenly forgot what the next move was. He scratched his head thinking for a little bit then showed a few more moves. Everyone saw that his sword movements were not methodical and his body and hand movements were extremely clumsy. They all clutched their stomachs laughing loudly at him.

"What's so funny? Let me show you a few moves. Give me a sword," The vegetable-person said. He then started to thrust and slash the sword very rapidly in a disorderly fashion as if he was insane. This made the crowd laughed even harder. In the beginning, Linghu Chong also laughed but after seeing more than ten moves, he was astounded. These two people's sword art, one being sluggish and the other one being very fast, actually had very little flaws. Their moves looked very ugly but the sword moves actually had many variations. It seemed that they had only displayed a fraction of the sword move's power and didn't reveal the remaining potential power of the sword moves.

Linghu Chong immediately stepped forward and bowed towards them. He said heartily, "Today, I paid my respect to

two seniors and observed your high sword arts. I feel really honoured." The two men put their swords away.

The firewood-person stared at him, "Little kid, you understood our sword art?"

"I don't dare to say that I understand. Both of you have profound sword arts, how would I dare to say that I understand them? Wudang School's sword art is very famous throughout the world. It really makes one praises to the heavens," Linghu Chong replied.

The vegetable-person asked, "Little kid, what's your name?"

Linghu Chong had not answered yet when a few people from the crowd called out, "What little kid?" "He's our Chief, Master Linghu." "Country bumpkins, speak more politely!"

The firewood-person said, "Linghu Melon? Not A Mao or A Gou, but some kind of melon seed. Your name's really ugly."

Linghu Chong cupped his fist, "Today, Linghu Chong is able to see Wudang's divine sword art. It's really admirable. I will go up the mountain to meet Priest Chongxu another day. I sincerely admire him. Can two seniors please reveal your honourable surnames and given names?"

The firewood-person spat on the ground and said, "You have so many people making so much noise here. Beating gongs and drums non-stop. Is this a funeral procession?"

Linghu Chong knew that these two people must be masters from the Wudang School. So he respectfully bowed to them, "We have a friend who is being detained inside the Shaolin temple. We're going there to beg Abbot Fangzheng's mercy to release this person."

The vegetable-person said, "So it's not a funeral procession! But you've hurt my uncle's donkey, are you going to pay?"

Linghu Chong led three steeds over and said, "These three horses aren't as good as senior's donkey. But I'm forced to ask seniors to accept them. We juniors didn't know that it

was senior who was riding. Please forgive us." After he finished saying this, he led the three horses over to them.

The crowd saw Linghu Chong's attitude becoming more and more modest and respectful. They saw that he was doing this on purpose and were very surprised to see this.

"You already know our sword art now. Do you want to compare some moves?" The vegetable-person asked.

"Junior is not the match of two seniors," Linghu Chong said.

The firewood-person said, "You don't want to fight. But I want to fight." At the same time he said this, he thrust his sword crookedly towards Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong saw this sword move was wonderful as it covered nine fatal points on his upper body. "Good sword art!" Linghu Chong called out and at the same time, pulled his long sword out and also thrust his sword. That firewood-person looked as if he just randomly thrust his sword at an empty space and Linghu Chong countered by sweeping his sword in a circle at the same empty space. The two people had used

around seven to eight moves. Each of their thrust was always aimed at an empty space and their swords had not clashed yet, but the firewood-person kept retreating step by step.

The vegetable-person called out, "Melon seed, so you have a bit of skill after all," as he raised his sword and disorderly started to thrust and slash. In a short moment, he had slashed out around twenty times. Not only was each of his slash towards Linghu Chong didn't hit him but the tip of his sword was actually still around seven to eight feet away from Linghu Chong's body. Raising his sword, Linghu Chong sometimes

performed a move towards that firewood-person and sometimes he thrust at an empty space towards that vegetable-person. The tip of his sword was also around seven to eight feet away from their bodies. But when these two



people saw Linghu Chong's move, their expressions revealed their urgency either to jump to avoid his slash or to brandish their swords to block.

The crowd of heroes watching this were all stupefied. The tip of Linghu Chong's sword was still far away from the two people and there wasn't the slightest bit of wind when he thrust his sword and they were certain that he wasn't using any kind of invisible sword energy to attack. But why are these two people looking frightened as if they were too late in avoiding or blocking the sword?

As they observed more closely, the crowd came to understand that these two people must be two martial arts masters. At this time, when these two people were using their moves to attack, one was still attacking sluggishly and one was still attacking like a mad man. But at the same time, they still managed to concentrate fully on defending themselves. When they were avoiding or blocking Linghu Chong's attack, their movements were light and steady. Now there was no more laughter from the crowd.

Suddenly Linghu Chong heard those two people whistled and changed their sword art completely. The firewood-person slashed his long sword in a large circular path. While the vegetable-person used very fast movements going back and forth creating a starlike reflection with his sword.

Linghu Chong pointed his sword at a slight upward angle and unexpectedly he stopped completely. His two eyes were now sometimes staring at the firewood-person and sometimes casting a sidelong glance at that vegetable-person. As his eyes looked at a certain place, those two people did one of these three things -- they quickly changed their sword moves or cried out then retreated or turned their attacks into defence.

Ji Wushi, Old Man, and Zu Qianqiu had good martial arts. They gradually realised that when these two people moved to defend themselves, it was because of Linghu Chong's stare. He was always staring at their fatal acupoints.

They saw the firewood-person lifted his sword to slash it down and Linghu Chong gazed at his lower abdomen's Shanggu acupoint. He had not finished his slash when he quickly withdrew it to block his Shanggu acupoint. At this time, the vegetable-person thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong responded by looking at the Tianting acupoint which was at the left side of his neck. That person

hastily lowered his head which caused his sword to penetrate deep into the hardened rice field. It was as if Linghu Chong's two eyes were shooting projectiles and he wouldn't permit Linghu Chong's two eyes to take a look at his neck's Tianting acupoint.

Those two people were still utilising their sword moves and the sweat on their bodies was seeping through their clothes. In a short while, their trousers had also become wet with their sweat. That old man riding the donkey had so far just stayed on the side and not said a thing. He suddenly coughed and said, "Admirable, admirable. The two of you step back."

The two men replied together, "Yes!" But Linghu Chong's eyes were still circling around, never leaving their fatal acupoints. The two people waved their swords and retreated at the same time. From the beginning to the end, they didn't manage to break away from Linghu Chong's gaze.

That old person said, "Good sword art! Master Linghu, allow this old man to ask for your advice."

Linghu Chong replied, "You flatter me!" as he turned around and cupped his fist greeting the old man. Only now the two people were finally freed from the restraint of Linghu Chong's eyes. At the same time, they jumped backwards feeling just like two freed birds as they flew for tens of feet away.

The crowd cheered them. Even though the crowd didn't understand their sword arts at all, they could see the duo's high martial arts from the way they jumped, the distance they covered, and the beauty of their movements.

The old man said, "Master Linghu was very forgiving with his sword moves. If he were really fighting, you two would have a thousand holes and a hundred injuries on your bodies. And do you think he would have allowed you to finish your sword moves? Come here quickly to thank him."

The two men quickly flew over and bowed deeply. The vegetable-person said, "Today I found out that there's a heaven outside this heaven and there's another person above me. Master's high martial art is very rare in this world. Please forgive me for my rudeness before."

Linghu Chong returned his propriety, "Wudang's sword art is divine. Your two sword arts, one is Yin and one is Yang. Can they be the Taiji Sword?"

The vegetable-person said, "Master is laughing at us. The sword art we're using is the "Double Ritual Sword Art". It is divided into Yin and Yang but we haven't managed to combine them yet."

"Before when I was watching on the side, I was having difficulties distinguishing the sword art's subtlety. If we were actually fighting for real, I would certainly not be able to take advantage of the sword art's weakness," Linghu Chong said.

The old man said, "Why must master be so modest? The spots that master was looking at are definitely the Double Ritual Sword Art's weak points. Ai, this type of sword art... this type of sword art..." He continuously shook his head, "More than fifty years ago, Wudang School had two priests. It was on this road that the Double Ritual Sword Art was developed through their tens of years of hard work. I was aware that the sword art consists of one Yin and one Yang, soft and hard, Ai!"

He let out a long sigh, "I'm also aware that this sword art would not stand against a master swordsman."

Linghu Chong respectfully said, "These two uncles' sword arts are already so wonderful. If it were Wudang School's Priest Chongxu or the other masters, then it would be impossible for me to distinguish the secret of the sword art

by myself. Junior and friends here have gone past the bottom of Wudang Mountain, but we currently have a matter we must do. So we have to be impolite and not go up the mountain to pay our respects to Priest Chongxu. Once we've finished with this matter, I would go up to the Wudang Monastery and kowtow to the gods and Priest Chongxu."

At first, Linghu Chong was feeling haughty towards them. But after seeing the hard and soft aspects of their sword arts together and the many miraculous variations of it, he actually felt some admiration in his heart. Thus, although he had discovered the flaws in the sword moves, in his heart, he actually really admired them. After all, in

this world, which sword move didn't have any flaws?

He was guessing that this old man must be Wudang School's first-class master. That was why he said these few sentences so sincerely. That old man nodded his head, "You're still young but you're not arrogant at all. This is also very rare. Master Linghu, were you taught by Huashan School's senior Feng Qingyang?"

Linghu Chong was startled and thought, "Wow, his eyesight is so good. I didn't expect that he would find out about my sword art's background. Even though I can't disclose grand martial uncle Feng's whereabouts, because he already inquired frankly, I couldn't lie to him." He said, "Junior was lucky. I once had the opportunity to learn some of grand martial uncle Feng's sword art at a superficial level." These words had two meanings and it didn't reveal that Feng Qingyang had once taught him personally.

That old man smiled slightly, "Superficial knowledge, superficial knowledge! Hey, hey, superficial knowledge of senior Feng's sword art, is it that easy to acquire?" He took the sword from the firewood-person's hand and grasped it in his left hand. "Let me receive some lessons from this superficial knowledge of senior Feng's sword art."

Linghu Chong said, "How can Junior dare to fight senior?"

That old man just smiled slightly while he slowly turned to the right and raised his left hand upwards till his sword was in front of his chest. The point of his sword started to move circularly as if it was surrounding a ball about the size of two palms. Linghu Chong watched his sword attentively as he understood that this move contained infinite variations. That old man slowly moved forward with his sword still circling. Linghu Chong felt a dense cold air pressing up to him and if he didn't return his move now then he wouldn't be able to do it later. He said, "Sorry for offending senior." He wasn't able to see the weakness in the sword movement so he just made a false thrust with his sword.

Suddenly, that old man threw his sword into his right hand. With a flash of light, the sword slashed towards Linghu Chong's neck. This slash was an extremely fast killing movement. The spectators couldn't help but gasp in worry.

But as the old man exerted himself in this strike, Linghu Chong saw a weak point at the lower part of his body. He thrust his sword towards the old man's Yuanye acupoint at the lower part of his body. The old man moved his sword to block the thrust and the two swords clashed. Both people retreated a step. Linghu Chong felt that the old man's

sword was laced with internal energy which made his right hand shook. Linghu Chong could also feel needles and pins on his arm because of the impact. That old man was also surprised and an expression of amazement could be seen on his face.

The old man switched his sword to his left hand again and drew two circles in front of his body. Linghu Chong saw that his sword moved continuously and protected his whole body. It was unexpectedly without any flaws. Linghu Chong was secretly amazed, "I have never seen a sword art without any weakness before. If he attacks like this, how do I break it? Perhaps Senior Ren Woxing's sword art is more powerful compared to this old mister, but every move of his still has a weakness. How can it be that this old man's sword art has no

weakness at all?" He started to feel afraid and beads of sweat started to form on his forehead.

That old man formed his right fingers into a sword form and his left hand was continuously moving. Suddenly he thrust out, the tip of the sword vibrating; no one could see where the sword was aiming at.

This thrust enveloped seven major acupoints on Linghu Chong's upper body. But because of this, Linghu Chong was also able to see three weaknesses on his opponent's upper body. He did not need to attack all these weak points, one would be sufficient to take the old man's life. He thought, "When he's defending, he has no weakness at all. But when he starts to attack, there's still a weakness that can be

attacked." as he casually pierced his long sword towards the old man's left eyebrow.

If that old man continued with his thrust then his left forehead would be pierced first. Even though his thrust was earlier than Linghu Chong's, it was still a step too late.

That old man quickly turned his sword around. Suddenly, Linghu Chong saw a few circles of white light. Big circle, small circle, upright circle, slanting circle, they were all flickering incessantly. As he saw these flowery patterns in his eyes, he quickly turned his sword and slantingly attacked the sword circles. "Tang" as both swords

clashed with each other. Linghu Chong felt his arm tingling from the impact.

That old man continued to move his swords creating more and more flickering circles as they moved. Not long after, his whole body was surrounded in the middle of these rings of light. One circle of light had not yet disappeared when another circle of light was formed. Even though his long sword was extremely fast, there was no sound of the sword's edge splitting the air at all. It indicated that he had reached the stage of perfection where the sword was soft but yet still strong.

At this time, Linghu Chong couldn't see any weakness in his sword art and felt as if there were thousands of swords protecting this old man's whole body. The old man was purely defending at the moment so there was no weakness in his sword art. But this sword front was actually like a moving fort and the thousands of light circles

resembled a tide as it slowly rushed forward. That old man wasn't attacking using one move at a time anymore. He was now using tens of moves to protect himself while at the same time used this to attack. Linghu Chong was unable to resist this as he retreated to avoid it.

He retreated a step and the circles of light moved forward a step. In a short time, Linghu Chong had retreated seven to eight steps. The crowd saw that their Chief was now in an unfavourable situation and was about to lose. They were holding their breath watching and cold sweat started to wet their hands. Peachtree Root Fairy suddenly said, "What sword art is that? It's like a child drawing some circles. I can draw too."

"Come, I'll draw some circles. My circle would definitely be more round than his," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

"Brother Linghu, don't be afraid. If you lose, we'll tear this old fellow into four pieces to vent your anger," Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

"What you said was wrong. One, he's Chief Linghu not brother Linghu. Two, how do you know that he's afraid?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

"Even though Linghu Chong has become Chief, he's still younger than me. So once he's chief, does he then also become big brother Linghu, uncle Linghu, grandpa Linghu, great grandpa Linghu?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

At this time, Linghu Chong retreated again and the crowd was feeling very anxious. When they heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies talking nonsense, they now got angry.

Linghu Chong retreated another step and his left foot stepped into a puddle of water. A thought flashed in his

mind, "That day grand martial uncle Feng repeatedly told me to keep in my heart that the world's martial art is ever changing and there are also unusual ones. But no matter how wonderful the opponent's moves are, they are still

moves. So there must be a weakness. When hero Dugu passed on his sword art, he had no match in this world because he was able to see his enemy's weakness. Right now, this senior's sword art is circling around and has no weakness at all. But it must be because I had not been able to see the weakness yet."

He retreated a few more steps as he gazed at his opponent's countless circles of light. Suddenly, a thought leapt into his head, "Maybe the centre of the circle is the weakness. But if it's not a weakness and I thrust in there, he can twist his sword and cut my arm off."

He also thought, "Luckily, his way of attack can only go forward slowly. If he really wants to kill me, it won't be that easy. But if I keep retreating, that's just the same as losing. If I lose this battle, everyone would be discouraged. Then how would we be able to break through Shaolin and save Yingying?"

At the thought of Yingying's kindness towards him, if he loses an arm because of her, what's the harm in that? From the depth of his heart, he was really pleased to actually sacrifice an arm for her. He also felt that he owed her a lot and only by suffering a heavy injury would he be able to repay for her kindness. At this thought, he whole-heartedly hoped that his opponent would really cut his arm as he extended his arm to thrust his long sword into the centre of the circle. A "tang" sound resounded as Linghu Chong felt his chest shook and felt blood bubbling forth but his arm was still intact. That old man retreated a couple of steps and put away his sword. The expression on his face was odd. There were also expressions of surprise and shame together with some expression of sympathy towards him. After some time,



he said, "Master Linghu's sword art is brilliant and your courage and wisdom are excellent. Admirable, admirable!"

At this time Linghu Chong just realised, when he took that risk to thrust his sword, he had actually succeeded in finding his opponent's sword art's weak point. It was just that this old man's sword art was really high. The centre of the circle was actually the most dangerous place and he had unexpectedly practised this sword art so that it

would also be the weak point. The thousands of swordsmen in the world, it would be very rare for one to be brave enough to go through this danger and thrust his sword in there. He was pleased with himself and thought, "Lucky, lucky!" as he felt sweat running down his back. He quickly bowed, "Senior's sword art is divine. I'm really

indebted to your advice. The benefit to Junior isn't shallow." His words were not just common talk. This fight had actually benefited his martial art greatly as it made him learn that the enemy's strongest point could unexpectedly be their weakest point. If he

could break the move at the strongest place then he would be able to break the rest of the weaknesses easily.

When masters competed in swords, one move could decide the outcome. That old man saw Linghu Chong dared to thrust into the middle of his circle of lights so they didn't need to compete anymore. He gazed at Linghu Chong for a while before saying, "Master Linghu, old man has a few words I want to say to you."

Linghu Chong replied, "Yes, I'll listen to senior's advice." That old man gave his long sword to the vegetable-person and walked away to the east. Linghu Chong threw his long sword on the ground and followed behind him.

He stopped besides a big tree. They were tens of feet away from the crowd, even though they were still able to see the crowd, their voices would not carry that far. The old man sat down under the tree's shade and pointed to a big rock, "Please sit down." He waited for Linghu Chong to settle

himself before continuing, "Master Linghu, among the younger generations, it's very rare to find someone with your kind of talent." Linghu Chong said, "I don't dare. Junior's conduct is improper and my reputation is already ruined. My own master can't even tolerate me. How can I deserve to receive senior's praise?"

That old man said, "The martial people of my generation, our conduct must be open and aboveboard and have no qualms in our heart. Although your action is sometimes bold and wild, and also not according to the custom, it is still gentlemanly. I secretly sent some people to find out what misdeeds you've truly done. It's not sufficient to just rely on the rumours and slanders going around in Jianghu."

When Linghu Chong heard him said this, it struck a chord in his heart. He felt gratitude towards this old man. He thought, "This senior must have a high position in Wudang School. Otherwise, how would he be able to send people to investigate about my conduct?"

The old man went on, "It's common that youngsters like to show off. Mr. Yue's outward appearance is calm, but he's easily offended..."

Linghu Chong quickly stood up and said, "Respected master is like a father to me. Junior doesn't dare to hear about Master."

That old man smiled slightly, "You didn't forget your roots, that's very good. Old man just made an indiscreet remark." Suddenly, his face turned serious and asked, "How long have you been learning the Art of Essence Absorbing?"

Linghu Chong replied, "Half a year ago, Junior accidentally learned this skill. At that time, I didn't know that this was the Art of Essence Absorbing."

That old man nodded, "That's how it is! Just then we clashed sword three times and with each clash, you absorbed my internal energy. But I was aware that you're still not good at using this disastrous demonic skill. Old man has an advise

to give you but I don't know whether young hero would listen to it or not?"

Linghu Chong was greatly terrified and quickly bowed, "Junior will certainly obey senior's precious words."

The old man replied, "Although this Art of Essence Absorbing has great power, it is also harmful towards the user's body. As your skill in it gets deeper, it will harm you even more. If young hero could abandon this demonic skill altogether then that will be the best. Otherwise, you can just stop practising it from now on."

That day in Plum Manor, he had heard Ren Woxing telling him that there would be great danger after practising the Art of Essence Absorbing for sometime. He wanted him to join the Devil Sect before divulging to him the method to meld the internal energies together. When he heard what this old man said, he believed even more what Ren Woxing said was true. "Junior will never forget senior's teaching. Junior

already knows that this method isn't right and already decided not to use this method to harm other people. It's just that my body already learned this method, so even if I didn't want to use it, it's not that easy."

The old man nodded, "That's what I've heard too. I have another matter to raise to young hero. Perhaps this will be difficult for young hero to do. But as a hero, you must do what ordinary people won't do. In Shaolin temple, they have a skill called "Tendon Altering Sutra". Young hero must've heard of this skill before."

Linghu Chong said, "I have. I heard that this is Wulin's most supreme internal energy method. And only the most eminent monks in Shaolin are allowed to learn this skill."

That old man said, "Young hero is leading so many people to go to Shaolin, I'm afraid nothing good will come out of this. No matter which side is victorious, both sides would lose numerous masters and would bring bad luck to Wulin. Old man has no talent, but I'm willing to go to Shaolin to ask for Abbot's mercy to give the "Tendon

Altering Sutra" to young hero. Then young hero can disband this large group of people to stop this disaster from happening. What does young hero think of this?"

"How about young lady Ren who is being detained in Shaolin temple?" Linghu Chong asked.

That old man said, "Young lady Ren has killed four disciples of Shaolin School and has also stirred up trouble in Jianghu and caused harm in the world. Great Master Fangzheng put her into seclusion not to take revenge for his own school. It is actually because of his kind heartedness to benefit the Jianghu people. How can young hero

with good conduct mix up with this nameless lady? Why should you associate with this Devil Sect's witch and ruin your reputation and future?"

"I've received her kindness so I must repay her. Junior appreciates senior's good idea but I don't dare to follow it," Linghu Chong said.

That old man let out a long sigh and shook his head, "When young people are drowned in beauty and has been snared by it, it's hard to free themselves from it."

Linghu Chong bowed, "Junior will take my leave now."

That old man said, "Wait. Although old man and Huashan School doesn't have many dealings, Mr. Yue would surely give me some face. If you follow my advice, old man and Shaolin temple's abbot will together guarantee that you will be accepted back into Huashan School. Do you trust me?"

Linghu Chong was moved by this as returning to Huashan was his biggest wish. From the level of this old man's martial art and from what he just said, the old man must certainly be a famous Wudang School's senior. He said that Abbot Fangzheng and he would guarantee this matter believing that they would certainly succeed. Master had always taken into consideration relationship between everyone from the orthodox sects. Shaolin and Wudang were the two biggest schools in Wulin at the present time. When the leaders of these two schools speak out, it would be very

difficult for Master not to do them the favour for the sake of their relationship.

Master was like a father to himself. This matter of him being expelled from Huashan was because he had made friends with Xiang Wentian and Yingying and made Master lose face in front of all the orthodox schools. But if the leaders of Shaolin and Wudang acted on behalf of him, Master would definitely accept him back. When he returned to Huashan, he would be able to see little martial sister from dawn to dusk. However, how could he just leave Yingying to suffer in a Shaolin's cave at the back of the mountain? At this thought, he felt heat coming up his chest, "If junior can't rescue young lady Ren out of Shaolin temple then I'll be a useless person. No matter if we win or lose in this matter, if I'm still alive after that, I will definitely go up Mount Wudang to thank Priest Chongxu and senior."

That old man let out a long sigh, "You don't regard your life highly nor your master highly nor your future reputation. You acted wilfully just for this Devil Sect's witch. In the future, if she become heartless towards you and harm you, you won't regret it?"

"My life was saved by young lady Ren. What's there to regret if I lose my life because of her?" Linghu Chong said.

That old man nodded, "Alright, you can go."

Linghu Chong bowed to take his leave again. He then turned around towards the crowd and shouted, "Let's go!"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy asked, "That old fellow competed in swordplay with you but how come there's no winner or loser? There's no need to compete then."

Even though Linghu Chong and the old man duelled, the winner and loser had not been decided. It was because the old man merely decided that he wasn't Linghu Chong's match and thus immediately gave up. But everyone else in the crowd didn't know that Linghu Chong had attacked the old man's sword art's flaw so they didn't know what happened.

"This senior's sword art is very high. If we keep on fighting, it won't be easy for me so it's better if we just don't fight," Linghu Chong said.

"You're so stupid. Since there's no winner or loser, you should've kept fighting and you'd definitely win," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Not necessarily."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "What not necessarily? That old fellow is already much older than you so of course he's not as strong as you. After a long time, you'll naturally get the upper hand."

Linghu Chong had not replied yet when Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Why is it when you're older, you're not as strong anymore?"

Linghu Chong understood what Peachtree Root Fairy meant. Between those Peach Valley Six Fairies, Peachtree Root Fairy was the oldest while Peachtree Fruit Fairy was the youngest. When Peachtree Fruit Fairy said when you're older then you wouldn't be as strong anymore, of course Peachtree Root Fairy didn't agree.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "If the younger you are, the stronger you get, then a three year old child would be the strongest then?"

"That's not true. A three year old child can't be the strongest. A two year old child would be stronger than a three year old," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

"You're also wrong. A one year old child would be stronger than a two year old," Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"A foetus that hasn't come out from his mother's womb would be the strongest then," Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

They kept on going north and had finally entered the boundary of Henan. Unexpectedly, they met with two more groups of heroes coming from the east and the west. They already had more than two thousand people with them before. But after adding those two extra groups to their main group, they now had more than four thousand people with

them. These four thousand people just slept anywhere at night. It didn't matter whether it was on grass, forest or wild hill, they just put their heads down and slept. But foods and drinks were a big problem. After many days, at the restaurants and drink shops on the towns that they were going through, they broke all the pots, tables and chairs because they didn't get enough to drink and eat. They were all angry and destroyed the restaurants.

Linghu Chong saw that these Jianghu's heroes were quite violent but they were also very loyal and frank people. If Shaolin Temple didn't want to release Yingying, then both sides would get into a bloody battle and the outcome would unavoidably be horrible. Everyday, he waited for news from Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. He was hoping that due to the two Shi Tai's reputations, Abbot Fangzheng would agree to release Yingying and avoid the catastrophe from happening. Only three days remained until the fifteenth of the twelfth month and they were now less than a hundred li from the Shaolin Temple but there was still no news from the two Shi Tai. The way they were going to Shaolin temple with banners flying and drums beating, everyone must have heard of their advance. But so far, there was no movement from the other party at all as if nothing was happening. Linghu Chong raised this issue with Zu Qianqiu and Ji Wushi and they also felt worried about this.

That night, the group stayed in an open field. Sentries were put on the outside of the group to prevent possible night raids from the enemy. The wind was blowing coldly and the grey clouds hanged low on the sky. It appeared that a big rain was about to pour down. The open field was filled with cooking fires in tens of li in every direction. Not restrained by any military command, the group of warriors acted more or less as a mob as they gathered together singing and shouting loudly shaking the ground. There were also people with swords and sabres out competing with each other while

some were wrestling. Everywhere, it was noisy and filled with shouts.

Linghu Chong thought, "It's best if I don't let these people step on the grounds of Shaolin Temple. Why don't I go first to ask Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng? If I can get Yingying out, wouldn't it be a great celebration for everyone?" At this thought, his whole body felt hot. After he thought more on this, he changed his mind,

"But if I fight the Shaolin's monks just by myself then I'll be captured or even killed. I'm not worried about dying but there'll be no one to preside over these people. Without a leader, there will be chaos in this group of heroes and they wouldn't be able to get Yingying out. More over, many of these several thousands of courageous and upright friends would probably be killed on Mount Shaoshi. If I acted rashly and ruin this matter, how would I be able to apologise to all these people?"

He stood up and looked around him. Looking at the people besides the piles of fire, he thought, "If they're not doing this for Yingying, they wouldn't have submitted to me at all."

Two days later, they arrived on Mount Shaoshi and were just outside of the Shaolin Temple. During these two days, even more warriors joined their group. The people he had met on that day on Five-Tyrant Ridge's gathering including Huang Boliu, Sima Big, Blue Phoenix as well as White Flood Dragon's Clan leader Shi and the "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" had all come. There were still many heroes that Linghu

Chong didn't manage to see who had come as well. Conservatively, they had around five to six thousands people now.

Several hundred drums were beating shaking the ground and trembling the sky. The group was beating the drums for a long time but not a single monk came out of the temple. Linghu Chong roared out his command, "Stop the drum!" The



beating sounds gradually became lighter until they finally stopped. Linghu Chong took a deep breath and in a clear voice said, "Junior Linghu Chong and many friends from Jianghu have come to pay a visit to Shaolin's Abbot. I ask respectfully to be granted a meeting." Linghu Chong attached abundant of internal energy into his voice and he was heard from many li but there was still no sound from inside the temple. Linghu Chong spoke again and yet there was still no response from the temple. Linghu Chong said, "Brother Zu, please offer our visit card."

"Yes," Zu Qianqiu complied as he carried the prepared visit box which stored the card with Linghu Chong's name and the names of leaders from various sects. He went up to the main gate of the Shaolin Temple and knocked on it a few times. When there was still no sound coming from the temple, he lightly pushed on the gate. The gate wasn't bolted and it opened easily. He looked inside and couldn't see anyone

around. He didn't dare to go into the temple without authorisation so he turned around to report to Linghu Chong. Although Linghu Chong's martial art was high, he still didn't have much experience and had never led a large group of people before. With this unanticipated situation before him, he didn't know what to do. He was momentarily stupefied and speechless.

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "All the monks in the temple have all escaped? Let's go inside! If we see any shiny head, we'll kill him straight away."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "You said all the monks have all escaped. If so, where are you going to find some shiny heads to kill?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Don't nuns also have shiny heads?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "It's a monk's temple, how can there be nuns in there?"

Peachtree Root Fairy quickly pointed his fingers at a person. "This man here isn't a monk, he's also not a nun, but he has a shiny head."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy asked, "Why do you want to kill him?"

Ji Wushi interrupted, "How about we go in and take a look?"

Linghu Chong replied, "That's good. Brother Ji, brother Old, brother Zu, and clan leader Huang, please accompany me into the temple. Everybody please pass this order to restrict your subordinates from acting wildly and tell them they must not be rude to any Shaolin monk. Also they can't burn any grass or trees on this mountain."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Then you can't even pull out any grass?"

Linghu Chong was feeling worried about Yingying so he strode purposefully into the temple. Ji Wushi and the other three people followed behind him.

After entering through the gate, they walked on a stone path and went past the front courtyard and the front hall, and arrived at the Great Hero Precious Hall. In the hall, they saw the majestic likeness of Rulai Buddha. They saw the floor and the table were covered with a thin layer of dust. Zu Qianqiu said, "Could it be that all the monks in the temple have escaped?" Linghu Chong chided, "Brother Zu, don't say this word 'escape'."

The five people stood quietly and tried to listen for any sounds. But apart from the clamoring noise from the group outside the temple, there was no sound at all coming from the temple.

"The Shaolin monks must be hiding around the place to ambush us," Ji Wushi whispered.

Linghu Chong thought, "Abbot Fangzheng and Great Master Fangsheng are all eminent monks. Why would they use deceit? But knowing that a lot of unorthodox sects came together to attack, the Shaolin monks may have wanted a

battle of wits instead of strength. That's not unusual." He saw that Shaolin Temple was a huge place but saw no sign of anyone. A sense of dread started to wash over him as he worried about what they might have done to Yingying.

The five of them looked around and listened to all directions as they walked further in. After passing two large courtyards, they arrived at the back hall. Suddenly, Linghu Chong and Ji Wushi stopped at the same time and made some hand signals. Old Man and the other two people immediately stopped. Linghu Chong pointed to a side room on the northwest side and quietly walked there. Old Man and the other three people followed him. They heard light groaning sounds coming from the inside of the room. Linghu Chong stopped in front of the door and pulled his sword out. He then extended his hand to push the door open while leaning his body to one side to protect himself against projectiles from inside the room. As the door creaked open, they again heard the light groaning sound from inside.

Linghu Chong turned his head to look inside the room and was greatly surprised to see two old nuns on the floor. He recognized the nun facing towards him as Dingyi Shi Tai. With her face pale and her eyes closed, it looked as if she had died. His body shot forward like an arrow going into the room. Zu Qianqiu called out, "Chief, be careful!" as he followed him in. Linghu Chong went around Dingyi Shi Tai's body to have a look at the other person lying down. As expected, she was Heng-Shan School's leader Dingxian Shi Tai.

Linghu Chong stooped down and called out, "Shi Tai, Shi Tai."

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly opened her eyes. She was really sluggish at the beginning but there was a flash of happiness in her eyes as she recognised him. Her mouth moved like she was trying to say something but she couldn't get any sound out. Linghu Chong stooped even lower, "It's Junior Linghu Chong." Dingxian Shi Tai's mouth moved again and managed

to whisper really lightly. Linghu Chong managed to hear her saying, "You... you... you..." He saw her injuries were really serious and didn't know how much longer she would live. Dingxian Shi Tai uttered a few more words, "You... You promise me..."

Linghu Chong hastily said, "Yes, yes. Whatever Shi Tai orders, Linghu Chong will do it. Even until my body turned to dust, I will still accomplish it."

Thinking of the two Shi Tai dying in Shaolin Temple on his account, tears started to flow down his cheeks. Dingxian Shi Tai whispered, "You... you're certain that you can promise... promise me?"

Linghu Chong replied, "I promise!"

Dingxian Shi Tai's glimmered with happiness. "You... you promise to take charge of... take charge of Heng-Shan School family..." After saying these few words, she was out of breath.

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised, "Junior is a male, I can't be your noble school's leader. But Shi Tai be at ease, no matter what kind of difficulty or calamity your noble school is in, Junior will do my best to undertake the burden."

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly shook her head, "No, no. I... I'm passing you Linghu Chong, the Heng-Shan School... Heng-Shan School's leadership. If you... you don't agree, I'll die... die with an unfulfilled wish."

Zu Qianqiu and the other three people were standing behind Linghu Chong. They all felt Dingxian Shi Tai's last wish was too unthinkable. Linghu Chong's heart was in great confusion and felt that this was a really difficult matter to decide on. But he saw that Dingxian Shi Tai only had a short time to live. With blood welling up in his heart, he promised, "Alright, Junior agrees to Shi Tai's request."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled and whispered, "Many... many thanks! Heng-Shan School's hundreds of disc... disciples, from now on they'll all bother... bother young hero Linghu." Linghu Chong was alarmed, indignant, and grieved, "Shaolin temple is so unreasonable, why would they be so violent

towards Shi Tai, Junior..." Just then Dingxian Shi Tai's head lolled to one side and her eyes closed. Greatly alarmed, Linghu Chong quickly extended his hand to check on her breathing but she had stopped breathing. His heart was grieved. He turned around and touched Dingyi Shi Tai's hand. Her cold hands indicated that she had been dead for a long time. Indignation and sadness washed over him and he found himself choked with tears.

Old Man said, "Master Linghu, we must avenge the two Shi Tai. All those bald donkeys have run away from the temple. Let's burn this Shaolin Temple to the ground."

Linghu Chong's heart was filled with grief and indignation; he slapped his thigh and said, "Alright! Let's burn Shaolin Temple to the ground."

Ji Wushi hastily said, "No! No! If Sacred Lady is still imprisoned in here then she'll also be burnt to death."

Linghu Chong had said that absent-mindedly. He felt cold sweat breaking out from his back as he conceded, "I was confused. If brother Ji didn't remind me, I would've ruined this matter. What should we do now?"

Ji Wushi replied, "Shaolin temple has many rooms, it'll be hard for the five of us to search all the places. Chief, please pass an order to call two hundred brothers to come in and search the temple."

Linghu Chong said, "Right. Brother Ji, please go out and get more people."

"Yes," Ji Wushi replied and turned his body around to go out.

Zu Qianqiu called out, "Don't let those Peach Valley Six Weirdos come in."

Linghu Chong lifted the bodies of the two Shi Tai and put them on a bed. Kneeling down, he kowtowed a few times to them and silently prayed, "Disciple will do my best to avenge both Shi Tai. You can rest easy in heaven about the Heng-Shan School family." He stood up and looked carefully at the injuries on the two bodies but didn't see any cut or traces of

blood on them. It was also inappropriate for him to lift their gowns to investigate further. He guessed that it was masters from Shaolin who must have used their palm's inner energy and caused fatal internal injuries.

The sound of steps from two hundred heroes was then heard entering the temple as they separately went to search the area. Suddenly, someone shouted from outside the gate, "Linghu Chong's not letting us in. But we want to go in, what's he going to do?" It was Peachtree Branch Fairy's voice. Linghu Chong scowled pretending not to have heard it. Then he heard Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "We've come to the world's famous Shaolin Temple. But we're not allowed to go in and take a stroll in there, how can he treat us so unjustly?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "If we entered the Shaolin Temple and don't meet the world's famous Shaolin monks then that'll be even more injustice."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "If we can't meet Shaolin temple's monks then we can't compare martial art against the world's famous Shaolin School's martial art. That's even more injustice."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "The most famous ones are in Shaolin Temple but we can't see a single monk here. This is really strange."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "There's no monk, that's not strange. But the strange thing is there are two nuns."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "There are two nuns, that's also not strange. What's strange is that the nuns are not only old, they're also dead."

The six brothers were talking back and forth as they walked towards the back courtyard.

Linghu Chong together with Zu Qianqiu, Old Man, and Huang Boliu walked away from the side room. Once they were out of the door, they saw the group that was searching around inside the Shaolin temple. After a while, people started to come and continuously reported their findings.

They reported that not only the monks were gone from the temple but also the porters and cooks had also gone. One person reported that the Buddhist scriptures, records, and appliances had also been moved away. Not even a bowl was left behind. Another person reported that the firewood, rice, oil, and salt had all been emptied out. Even the vegetables in the garden had been pulled clean.

Every time Linghu Chong heard a report, he was more and more disheartened. He thought, "The Shaolin Temple's monks cleaned this place up so thoroughly. So much so that they didn't even leave behind a single vegetable in the garden. They must've moved Yingying somewhere else too. The world is so big, where do I begin to look for her?"

Close to two hours later, the two hundred people had finished searching the thousands of rooms in the Shaolin temple. They had even searched underneath the Buddha statues and the back of the Shaolin's name board. But not even a single piece of paper was found. There were people who were pleased with themselves saying, "Shaolin School is Wulin's number one school. But when they heard us coming, they unexpectedly ran away. This thing has never happened in more than a thousand year."

Another person said, "We're so powerful. So no one in Wulin dares to look down upon us."

But there was a person who said, "The Shaolin monks were definitely driven away from hearing our might, but what about Sacred Lady? We came here to meet Sacred Lady, not to drive away the monks."

Everyone thought that this was reasonable. When some people heard this, they hanged their heads down as if someone had died. There were some who looked towards Linghu Chong waiting to hear what he had to say. Linghu Chong said, "This is beyond our expectations. Who would have expected that Shaolin monks would leave their temple. I have no idea how to handle this situation. One person's

thought is limited, if we have more than two then we would have more ideas. So please give me your opinions."

Huang Boliu said, "In my opinion, finding Sacred Lady is difficult while finding Shaolin monks is easier. Shaolin temple's monks numbered more than a thousand, they can't always hide forever. Once we found those Shaolin's monks, we'll definitely get a scent of where Sacred Lady is."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Clan leader Huang is right. We'll just stay inside this temple. Those Shaolin School's disciples would definitely not be willing to part with their thousand years old residence and allow us to live here. When they wanted to take back this temple from us then we'll ask them about Sacred Lady's whereabouts."

A person said, "Ask about Sacred Lady whereabouts? Why would they agree to tell us?"

Old Man said, "This so called asking is merely a polite way of saying it. We'll extort from them the answer. When we see any Shaolin monks, we'll capture them but not kill them. Then after we've captured eight to ten of them, are we still afraid that they won't tell us?"

Another person said, "If these monks still didn't want to tell us, then what do we do?"

Old Man said, "That's easy. We'll just ask Chief Blue to release some of her Divine Dragon, Divine Object on their bodies. Do we then still be afraid of them not disclosing the information?" Many people nodded their heads agreeing with what he said. Everyone knew that this so called "Chief Blue's Divine Dragon, Divine Object" was Chief Blue Phoenix's five poisons of viper and poison worm. When these venomous pests were put on people's bodies, they would start gnawing on their flesh. The pain would be comparable to the worst punishment that existed in this world. Blue Phoenix smiled and said, "Shaolin temple's monks have undergone lots of practice for a long time. I'm not sure if my Divine Dragon, Divine Object would work on them."



Linghu Chong suddenly thought, "We don't need to deal them with excessive punishment. We just need to capture as many monks as we can. After capturing a hundred of them, then we'll trade a hundred for one. That way we'll surely be able to get Yingying out."

Suddenly, a person with coarse voice said, "We haven't eaten meat for half a day, I'm starving. There's also no monks in the temple, otherwise we'll capture one with thin and white skin and steam him. That'll be very wonderful!" The person who said this had a high stature. It was the tall White Bear from the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert. Everyone knew that Black Bear and White Bear liked to eat human flesh. Although these few words of his could make other people vomit from hearing it, they had been on Mount Shaoshi for a long time now and had not had anything to eat or drink. Everyone felt hungry and thirsty and some people's stomachs were croaking from hunger.

Huang Boliu said, "Shaolin School is using this plan of strengthen whatever clear whatever."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Strengthen the defenses and clear the field."[30](#)

Huang Boliu said, "Right. They were hoping that we'd get hungry inside the temple then obediently go down the mountain. How can there be such an easy thing in this world?"

Linghu Chong asked, "What's clan leader Huang's opinion?"

Huang Boliu replied, "We'll send a group of brothers to go down the mountain and find out where these Shaolin monks had gone to. We'll send another group to purchase foodstuffs. Everyone else will be staying in the temple to guard... hmm.. whatever waiting for rabbit in order to avoid these monks' throwing... throwing whatever net." Huang Boliu loved to use proverbs when speaking but he didn't remember them clearly so the idioms he used would frequently be wrong.

Linghu Chong said, "That's a good idea. Clan leader Huang, please take the order and get five hundred astute and capable brothers to go down the mountain and find out the whereabouts of Shaolin monks. About this matter of purchasing foodstuffs, I ask clan leader Huang to handle this matter too." Huang Boliu complied with his order and turned around to go out.

Blue Phoenix laughed, "Hopefully clan leader Huang can handle this matter. Otherwise, White Bear and Black Bear would be very hungry and start to eat everything they see."

Huang Boliu laughed, "Old man will take care of this. But even if those Bear Duo of Northern Desert get really hungry till their belly is shrunk, they still wouldn't dare to even touch Chief Blue's fingers."

Zu Qianqiu said, "The temple's monks have all gone out. I'd like to ask friends here to do this one thing. Could you please have a look everywhere again? See if there's anything unusual, maybe we'll be able to find some clues." The crowd boomed their replies and started to go to take a look around.

Linghu Chong sat on a kneeling mat in the Great Hero Precious Hall and was looking at the majestic likeness of the Rulai Buddha. The statue had an expression of pity and mercifulness. He thought, "Abbott Fangzheng is an eminent monk. When he found out that we were coming here, he'd rather destroy Shaolin School's reputation than to lead people to fight us. In the end, he has avoided a big bloodbath here. But why did they kill Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai? I'm guessing the one who killed the two Shi Tai must be a vicious monk from this temple and the Abbott may have no idea at all about this. I must respect Abbott's good intentions and must not look for Shaolin monks to give them trouble. I must think of another way to save Yingying."

Suddenly, a burst of wind blew in through the door and hurled open the screen in front of him. The ash in the incense pot was blown all over the hall. Linghu Chong walked towards the hall's entrance and looked at the sky. The clouds

were grey and the north wind was blowing hard. He thought in his heart, "It's going to rain tonight." Just as he thought of this, flakes of snow started to float down from the sky. "The sky is cold and the ground is going to be frozen. I don't know if Yingying has winter clothes with her. Shaolin School has so many people they can deploy efficiently while we're only using bravery here to get Yingying out. This is impossible to do."

With his hands behind his back, he walked back and forth in the passage in front of the hall. The snow was falling on his head, face, gown, and hands. It quickly melted as it touched him.

His thought continued, "Just before Dingxian Shi Tai passed away, even though her injury was serious, she was still clear headed and wasn't confused in the slightest bit. But why did she want me to become Heng-Shan School's leader? Heng-Shan School doesn't even have a single man in their school. I also heard that all their previous leaders were all nuns. How can I be the leader of Heng-Shan School when I'm a man? When this gets out, people in Jianghu will laugh till their jaws drop. Hng, I already agreed to her request, how can a gentleman eat his own word? What I do or where I go, even if other people laughed at me, what's that got to do with them?" At this thought, his heroic spirit rose up.

Suddenly he heard light noises from half the mountain of people shouting. Not long after, the big group outside of the temple started to make a lot of noise. Linghu Chong was alarmed and he quickly rushed towards the temple's main gate. He saw Huang Boliu walking towards him with his face full of fresh blood. An arrow was stuck in his shoulder and the cut out shaft was trembling. He called out, "Chief, enemy... enemy is guarding the road going down the mountain. We have... have been thrown that... hmm, that net."

Linghu Chong was startled, "Are they Shaolin monks?"

Huang Boliu said, "They're not monks. They're just ordinary people. His granny, we haven't gone more than

three li when we were forced back by their arrows. Around ten brothers died and there are around seventy to eighty people injured. That's the whole army annihilated."

He then saw several hundred people rushing to retreat back to the temple. Many people in that group had been hit by arrows. The people in the main group were calling out like thunder as they prepared to die charging down the mountain. Linghu Chong asked, "What school is the enemy from? Did clan leader Huang manage to get a look?"

Huang Boliu said, "We didn't get near to the enemy. His granny, they're very good with their bows and arrows. We didn't get to see those bastards' faces clearly. They were shooting those arrows continuously. Usually, it's make friends when you're far and attack when you're near then all the arrows would hit its target."

Zu Qianqiu said, "It seems that Shaolin School deliberately left the temple to snare us. We're like a turtle captured in a jar."

Old Man said, "What turtle captured in a jar? How can you grow the enemy's spirit and extinguish our own power? This is... this is called to lure the enemy to penetrate deeply into their territory."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Alright. We'll say that it's luring the enemy to penetrate deeply into their territory. We're already here so what else is there to say? These monks want us to die of starvation on top of this Mount Shaoshi."

White Bear shouted, "Who wants to charge down the mountain with me to kill these bastards?" This was followed by more than a thousand people answering him.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Wait! The opponents are shooting arrows, we must think of a way to deal with them to avoid futilely injuring ourselves."

Ji Wushi said, "There's nothing else in this Buddhist temple but there are thousands of putuan here."

This reminded everyone as they said together, "Use those as shields. Those are just as good."

Several hundred people quickly rushed into the temple and brought out many putuans with them.

Linghu Chong called out, "Use these to block the arrows! Everyone rush down the mountain."

Ji Wushi said, "Chief, where should we gather after we rush down, what are we going to do after that, how are we going to save Sacred Lady, we have to arrange all these first."

Linghu Chong said, "Right. You saw just before how I didn't speak up on that matter, how can I still be Chief? I think after we got down the mountain, everyone should temporarily go back home first and ask around for the whereabouts of the Sacred Lady. We'll talk later to think of a way to save Sacred Lady."

Ji Wushi said, "Alright." and he quickly shouted Linghu Chong's order to the rest of the group.

That flesh eating monk Black Bear said, "Shaolin temple's bald donkeys are so hateful. Everyone, let's burn this ghost temple down then we'll rush down and stake our lives." He himself was a monk but he scolded them as "bald donkey" and didn't care about it.

The crowd cheered his idea. Linghu Chong waved his hand and shouted, "Sacred Lady is still in their hands right now, no one must be rude to them. Sacred Lady might be disadvantaged by that."

Everyone thought that what he said was right, "Alright, we'll let them off then."

Linghu Chong said, "Brother Ji, how do we charge down? Please assign us."

Ji Wushi saw Linghu Chong had no aptitude in commanding this group of heroes when dealing with the dangers so he didn't hesitate in taking control of the situation. He said in a loud and clear voice, "Friends, please listen to Chief's order. Everyone will go down the mountain through eight paths. East, south, west, and north are four of the paths. Southeast, southwest, northeast, and northwest

are the other four paths. We'll just quickly rush out of the encirclement and don't worry about killing them." He then assigned the path that each clan and school would be taking. About five to six hundred or seven to eight hundred people would be rushing each path.

Ji Wushi said, "The south path is the main road to go down the mountain and it has the most enemy there. Chief, we'll rush down the south road first and lead the enemy along with us. This will make it easier for the rest of the brothers to rush out of the encirclement."

Linghu Chong grasped his sword but didn't take a putuan with him as he strode to go down the mountain. The crowd roared their battle cry and separately rushed down through the eight paths. But on top of the mountain, there weren't eight paths to actually go down from so some people leaped as they went down. In the beginning, there were eight path they were taking but later they were just like bees swarming down the mountain. After Linghu Chong had gone for a few li, he heard many whirring sounds as a rain of arrows was released from the forest in front of him. He used Dugu Nine Swords' "Arrow-breaking stance" to bat away the arrows raining down on him while he was still rushing down the mountain. Suddenly, he heard someone crying out behind him. It was Blue Phoenix falling down as her left leg and left shoulder was hit at the same time. Linghu Chong hastily turned around to support her and said, "I'll protect you." Blue Phoenix said, "Don't worry about me. You... you... you going down the mountain is most important." At this time, the air was still buzzing from the arrows being shot towards them. Linghu Chong was still waving his hand around blocking the arrows coming towards him. But he saw people kept falling on the ground one by one as they were struck by the arrows.

Linghu Chong seized Blue Phoenix with his left hand and rushed down the mountain. The arrows kept on coming and Linghu Chong kept scattering them away with his sword. He felt worried as the arrows kept raining down. The people

shooting the arrows had strong martial art and the air was thick with arrows. Although the group of heroes had putuans to use, it was still hard for them to block these arrows as more and more people were hit. Linghu Chong couldn't decide whether to keep rushing down or turn back to the temple.

Ji Wushi called out, "Chief, enemy's arrows are too severe. Our brethrens can't rush down the mountain and many have been injured or killed. Let's call everyone back and we'll think of an idea." Linghu Chong knew that they were about to be defeated. If they clashed with the enemies, then the situation would be hopeless. He immediately called out, "Everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple! Everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple!" Even though thousands of people were shouting and crying out as they fought, his shout was still audible everywhere because of his abundant internal energy. Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, and tens of other people shouted out, "Chief's order, everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple." The crowd heard the order and started to retreat.

In front of the Shaolin temple, people were cursing, groaning, and calling out. The ground from east to west was covered by blood. Ji Wushi was giving out order to eight hundred uninjured people to separate into eight groups and guard the eight paths. These thousands of people who had come to Shaolin temple, half of them belonged to clans or sects and they were obeying orders. But the other two thousand people were just mobs and after they had been defeated, they were in confusion. They were each doing their own things and didn't know what to do.

Linghu Chong said, "Everyone, quickly treat our injured brethrens and give medicines to them." In his heart, he was thinking, "It's a shame that Heng-Shan School's disciples aren't here and we don't have their medicines." He continued thinking, "If Heng-Shan School's people are here, would they help me or would they side with the orthodox schools? En, the two Shi Tai were killed, of course they would help me."

He heard the crowd was still clamouring incessantly and he felt uneasy. If he was the only one who had been trapped on this mountain top, then he would've rushed down the mountain a long time ago. He wouldn't care if he died or live. But he was the leader of all these heroes and was responsible for these thousand of people's lives. As he thought of this, he didn't know what to do.

He saw that it was sunset already. Suddenly, sounds of drums and people calling out were heard from the mountainside. Linghu Chong drew his long sword out and rushed to the intersection of the road. The crowd of heroes also grasped their sabres wanting to fight the enemy to the death. They heard the sounds of drums getting louder and louder but the enemy didn't rush up. After a moment, the drums stopped and the crowd of heroes said one after another, "The drums stopped, they're coming up now." "If they rush up then we'll spill their blood till it flows like water and not spare a single one of them." "His granny, these bastards want us to die up here from hunger and thirst." "If those sons of a turtle aren't coming up then we'll rush down to them." "If you want to rush down then why are you still talking?"

Ji Wushi whispered to Linghu Chong, "If we can't sleep tonight and add to that we would also be hungry for one day and one night. Then everyone would be powerless to fight."

Linghu Chong replied, "Right. We'll select two to three hundred people with high martial art to open the way for us. At night, the enemy's arrows wouldn't be as accurate. We'll just disrupt the enemy and we can all rush forth to go down."

Ji Wushi said, "That's the plan then."

At this moment, the sounds of drums from the mountainside rose again followed by around a hundred people with white cloth wrapped around their heads rushing up the mountain. The group of heroes cried out and rushed forth to fight them. But these one hundred people only attacked for a short while before they whistled and retreated



back down the mountain. The crowd of heroes put their weapons down to rest. The drums sounded again and another group of people with white head wrap went up the mountain to attack. After fighting for a short while, they again retreated back down the mountain. Even though the enemy was retreating, the drums kept beating and another battle cry rose up not letting them rest.

Ji Wushi said, "Chief, the enemy is wearying our army and preventing us from taking a rest."

Linghu Chong said, "Yes. Brother Ji, please take care of it." Ji Wushi quickly passed down the order that if the enemy came up again, then only those people on guard duty would fight while the others would take a rest and not pay attention to them.

Zu Qianqiu said, "Let's talk now and pick three hundred good fighters. We then wait till the middle of the night, when the enemy attacks then these three hundred people would rush down. Once they started fighting with the enemy, these bastards wouldn't be able to shoot their arrows and everyone will rush down the mountain. Only by using this tactic of creating chaos would we be able to escape from this."

Linghu Chong said, "Fabulous. Brother Zu, please pick the people. Order them to wait for some confusion first before they charged down."

After about an hour, Zu Qianqiu had finished picking the three hundred first-class fighters to furiously rush down the mountain. Even if the enemy had a thousand people lined up to block them, they might not necessarily be able to stop these three hundred fierce tigers. Linghu Chong's vigour rose and he walked with Zu Qianqiu towards the mountain edge on the west side. He saw the three hundred people lined up there. Linghu Chong said, "Everyone, please sit down and rest. Wait until the sky is completely dark before going down to fight to the death." Those people boomed their replied.

At this time, the snow had been falling for some time and a thin layer of snow had accumulated on top of the ground

and the people's heads and gowns. There were some water jar in the temple but they were all empty. Even the water well had dried up. Everyone took up a handful of snow and started to put it in their mouths to quench their thirst. The sky was getting darker and darker until they could only vaguely looked at other people's faces. Zu Qianqiu said, "Fortunately tonight is snowing. Otherwise, tonight on the fifteenth, the moon would be very bright."

Suddenly, the quiet enveloped the whole area. Inside and outside the Shaolin temple where thousands of heroes were gathered, and also from the mountainside to the foot of the Mount Shaoshi where around two to three thousand people were, everyone had unexpectedly become quiet at the same time. The people who were about to say something also stayed silent as the quiet atmosphere scared them. Only the light sound of snowflakes falling on the tree leaves and grass was heard. Linghu Chong suddenly thought, "I wonder what little martial sister is doing at this time."

The sound of "wu, wu, wu" was heard throughout the mountainside followed by a loud cry from every direction. This time the enemy appeared to have taken advantage of the darkness to launch their attack with full power, unlike before when they were just bluffing. Linghu Chong waved his long sword and lightly said, "Charge!" Linghu Chong along with Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, Tian Boguang, Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, and those three hundred chosen warriors rushed down towards the northwest path.

The three hundred people rushed down the path as nothing was blocking them. After going for a li, Zu Qianqiu took out a small flare, lit it up, and shot it up into the air. It exploded with fireworks in the air. This was the signal for the heroes on top of the mountain to rush out of the temple.

Linghu Chong was rushing down the mountain when he felt his feet were hurting. It felt like he was trampling on nails. He felt uneasy about it and hastily leaped to the top of a tree. Zu Qianqiu and the rest of the people behind started

to cry out: "Ayo, not good, there's some trap on the ground!". Everyone felt their feet were being pricked by nails and some of their feet were even stabbed all the way through. The pain was unbearable. Dozens of their people were still rushing down ignoring the pain when suddenly they fell down a big pit. More than ten spears were quickly thrust out stabbing those people in the pit. Cries of pain were coming out of the pit and they were heard throughout the mountain.

"Chief, quickly give out the order to retreat back up the mountain!" Ji Wushi screamed.

Linghu Chong saw the situation and it was obvious that the orthodox schools had set up a trap at the bottom of the mountain. If they kept rushing down, the whole army would be annihilated. He quickly shouted, "Everyone go back to Shaolin temple! Everyone go back to Shaolin temple!"

He leaped to the top of another tree besides the pit and poked his long sword down stabbing three spearmen. He then jumped down to the ground and landed besides one of the spearmen with the thought that there wouldn't be any nails where these spearmen were standing on. All of a sudden, he had stabbed seven to eight people already. The remaining spearmen cried out and retreated. The forty or more people who had fallen down the pit jumped out one by one. But more than ten people were killed inside that pit. All they could see was the darkness of the night as they walked back. Even though the snow provided some light, they couldn't see where the traps might be. They limped back up the mountains with their heads hanging down. Fortunately, the enemy didn't take this opportunity to chase them.

The group of heroes went back into the temple. Under the candle light, they checked their injuries and found that nine out of ten people's feet were pierced by the nails. Everyone was swearing at the enemy. Apparently, when the enemy was beating those drums several times, they were actually covering the sound of them digging the pit and scattering the nails. These nails were around a foot long and

were very sharp. Seven part of it was buried underneath the ground with three part of it sticking out of the ground. It seemed that nails were scattered throughout the mountain. There may even be more than one hundred thousand of these nails buried on the ground.

Of course they had prepared these nails before hand. Otherwise, where would the enemy accumulate these many nails from? Even the more experienced heroes were still surprised and amazed when they thought of this. Ji Wushi pulled Linghu Chong to a side and quietly talked to him, "Master Linghu, we can't retreat anymore. We've been thinking day and night hoping to save Sacred Lady. We're forced to ask master to undertake this big matter alone."

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised, "You... you... what's the meaning of this?"

"We know that master is willing to help people and would not just abandon us and go by yourself. But in the future, who would take revenge for this big enmity we have? Sacred Lady is also still being imprisoned, who would rescue her to see the sky again?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "So brother Ji wants me to escape this mountain by myself. Don't think about this anymore. If we're going to die then we're just going to die, why do we need to think so much for? In this world, who doesn't die? We'll just die together. Sacred Lady is being imprisoned but in the future, she'll also die. Even though the orthodox schools are victorious today, years from now, wouldn't they also die one by one? This matter of winning or losing only determines whether you die sooner or later."

Seeing how Linghu Chong ignored his advice, Ji Wushi saw that it was no use to persuade him any further. But if Linghu Chong didn't take advantage of the darkness to escape then it would be impossible to run away. When day time comes again, the enemy would start to attack them and it would not be possible to flee. At this thought, he let out a long sigh.

Suddenly, they heard a few people laughing. They were getting more joyous as they laughed. The group of heroes had had a major defeat and was now bunched together inside the temple. Their lives would probably only last till morning. Unexpectedly, there were still some people who could laugh so happily at this time. When Linghu Chong and Ji Wushi heard this laughter, they both knew that it was the Peach Valley Six Fairies. They both thought, "In this world, only these six weirdos can still laugh like this when facing their deaths."

They heard one of the Peach Valley Six Fairies said, "In this world, there are actually these kinds of fools! Stepping their feet nicely on those nails, Hahaha, this is really funny."

Another one said, "You're all a bunch of idiots. You should've tested the ground with your feet first. If it hurts, of course they're steel nails. Haha, is it comfortable with these iron nails piercing through your feet?"

Another one laughed, "You've already tasted how it feels to have a steel nail through your feet. Why don't you use a steel hammer to hammer down some nails through your feet? Hahaha, hehehe, hahaha."

The six brothers were laughing until they were out of breath thinking that this was the funniest thing in the world. But no one else thought that this was funny.

The people who had their feet pierced by these steel nails were still crying out in pain. Yet, there were some inconsiderate people ridiculing and shouting abuses at them. But to scold back at the Peach Valley Six Fairies was a very difficult thing to do. They would debate every single word that came out of your mouth. If you scolded them "zhi niang zei" (straight mother thief), they would ask what's "zhe niang" (straight mother) and why not "wan niang" (bent mother); If you scolded them "wang ba dan" (king eight eggs or bastard), they'd persistently ask you how come it wasn't "wang qi dan, wang jiu dan" (king seven eggs or king nine eggs) and why must it be "wang ba dan" (king eight eggs).

In a short time, the hall became really noisy with people shouting. Some people even looked for weapons to fight them. Linghu Chong saw the situation was getting out of hand. He suddenly called out, "Yi, what's this? Fascinating, fascinating, this is very odd!"

When Peach Valley Six Fairies heard him, they immediately went over to him and asked, "What's so interesting?"

"I saw six rats biting a cat passing by here," Linghu Chong answered.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies were amused and they all asked, "I've never seen a mouse biting a cat before. Where did they go?"

Linghu Chong pointed somewhere and said, "They went there."

Peachtree Root Fairy pulled his hand, "Go, go! Everyone, let's take a look."

The group of heroes knew that Linghu Chong was actually referring to the Peach Valley Six Fairies as the six mice. Unexpectedly, the Fairies actually believed that there were actually six mice and felt really happy. The Peach Valley Six Fairies crowded Linghu Chong pushing him to go towards the path at the back of the hall.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Yi! Is that it?"

"I didn't see," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

Linghu Chong was intentionally trying to lead them far away from the rest of the people to prevent them from fighting. So he was just pointing anywhere and they walked farther and farther away from the group.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy pushed open a door on the side of the hall. Inside was jet black and they couldn't see anything.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Ayo, six mice are carrying a big cat and entering a cave."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Don't fool us." He lighted a fire stick but there was nothing inside the room besides a statue of Bodhisattva in a sitting position facing the wall.

Peachtree Root Fairy went up to the offering table to light up the oil lamp. He said, "Where's the cave? Let's drive these mice out." He took the oil lamp from the table to inspect the room but there was no cave at all.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "I'm afraid it might be behind the Bodhisattva."

"Behind the Bodhisattva is us seven people. Are we the mice?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"Bodhisattva is facing the wall. So its back is its front," Peachtree Branch Fairy reasoned.

"You know you said it wrong but don't want to admit it! How can the back be the front?" admonished Peachtree Trunk Fairy.

"The back is fine, front is also fine. Let's pull it open and have a look," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy replied together, "Yes." The three of them went forward to pull the statue open.

Linghu Chong called out, "Don't do that, this is ancestor Da Mo." He knew that ancestor Da Mo was Shaolin temple's grandmaster. Shaolin Temple was the leader in the study of the martial art because ancestor Da Mo passed his martial art down. Their martial art had been around for more than a thousand year without declining. Some time in the past, Da Mo sat facing the wall for nine years until he finally gained enlightenment. That was the reason why the statue of Da Mo in the temple was also facing the wall. Ancestor Da Mo was the ancestor of the Zen Buddhism in the central plain and he was held in reverence in both the Wulin world and in Buddhism. So far, the crowd of heroes had been following his order and didn't destroy any object in the temple. He didn't want them now to insult the statue of Da Mo.

But Peachtree Flower Fairy and his two brothers' playfulness were out already and they didn't pay attention to Linghu Chong's shout. The three people used their strength, which exceeded a thousand catty, to turn the statue of Da Mo

around. Suddenly, the seven people shouted in surprise as they saw an iron panel slowly rose up and exposed a big hole. The hardened rust on the hinges of the iron panel buckled open under the pressure of Peachtree Flower Fairy and the other two fairies' pull.

"There's really a cave!" Peachtree Branch Fairy exclaimed.

"Let's go have a look at those six mice carrying a cat," Peachtree Root Fairy said. He lowered his head and entered the hole. They all entered the hole one by one with Peachtree Trunk Fairy entering last. Inside, the hole was enormous and when the six people entered the hole, they were only able to hear their own footsteps. They only spent a short time in there admiring the hole before coming out.

Peachtree Branch Fairy called out, "It's so dark and deep inside that we can't see the bottom."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Since it's so dark, how do you know it's deep for certain? Maybe after a few more steps, we'll arrive at the bottom."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "If you already knew that you'll reach the bottom after a few more steps, why do you need to keep walking to find out if the bottom is there?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "I said 'maybe' not 'for certain'. 'Maybe' and 'for certain' are different."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "You already know that it's 'maybe', why do you still speak so much then?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "What are you quarrelling about? Quickly get two fire sticks to go inside and have a look."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "Why only two fire sticks, can't we light three sticks instead?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "If you light three sticks, why don't you light four then?"

These six people kept on talking incessantly but their hands were moving quickly. They broke the table's legs and lighted up four fire sticks. After fighting over the fire sticks



for a while, they entered the hole. Linghu Chong considered, "This must be a secret path of the Shaolin temple. That day when I was trapped in the Plum Manor, I also went through a long path. It seems that Yingying is being imprisoned here."

At this thought, his heart started to thump wildly and he quickly entered the hole. He quickened his steps to catch up to the Peach Valley Six Fairies. The path was wide and it was completely different from the narrow and damp path in Plum Manor. But it was very mouldy in the tunnel which made breathing uncomfortable.

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "We still haven't seen those six mice. I'm afraid they didn't come through this hole. Let's turn back and look in another area."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Turn back when we reach the end, we still have time."

The six people continued to walk forward again when suddenly a meditation stick dropped out of nowhere startling all of them. Peachtree Flower Fairy was walking in front and he hastily jumped back bumping into Peachtree Fruit Fairy's chest. They saw a monk holding a meditation stick striking from the right wall. Peachtree Flower Fairy was angry and he shouted, "His granny, bald donkey, they're hiding here to plot against grandpa." He extended his hand towards the wall to grab him. But another meditation stick thrust out from the left wall. Peachtree Flower Fairy could not step back anymore to avoid this stick so he leaped forward. His left foot just touched the ground when another stick flew out from the right wall.

At this time, Linghu Chong had seen everything clearly. There was no enemy using those meditation sticks but a couple of iron statues. These equipments were really wonderful. As soon as someone stepped on the ground these statues were covering, they would not only strike out but every strike was wonderfully and severely done. Peachtree Flower Fairy took out a short iron stick and blocked the strike but it was shaken violently as it flew out of his hand.

Peachtree Flower Fairy cried out and rolled around on the ground. But another iron meditation stick struck down towards his head. Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Branch Fairy took out their short iron sticks and rushed forward to save their brother. They raised both their sticks blocking the incoming meditation stick. But as the first one was blocked, the second one struck. Peachtree Trunk Fairy, Peachtree Leaf Fairy, and Peachtree Fruit Fairy rushed forward blocking this second strike. They were using these five sticks to block the incessant strikes of the two meditation sticks from the wall. Even though the iron monks using these meditation sticks were not alive, they were crafted very smartly and it was as if real Shaolin's monks were executing these skills or some eminent monks were directing the statues. Each strike done by these iron monks was very severe and pointed at a dangerous spot.

The meditation stick along with the iron monk's arm was made of fine steel which altogether weighed close to a hundred catty. This was further added to the force generated from the moving arm, which made the strike to be very powerful and similar to that of a master. Even though the Peach Valley Six Fairies' martial arts were powerful, the short iron sticks they were using were too short which made it hard for them to block the meditation sticks. The six brothers were calling out in pain. They wanted to withdraw but the way back was completely blocked by the meditation sticks. However, for every step they took going forward, more iron monks joined the fight.

Linghu Chong saw that the situation was dangerous and he also saw that although these iron monks' movements were refined, each movement had enormous flaws in it. He immediately drew his long sword out and pierced it towards an iron monk's two wrists. Bursts of sparks flew out as the long sword bounced back after colliding with the acupoints in the iron monk's wrists. At this moment, he heard the Peachtree Root Fairy shouting ferociously as he was hit by

the meditation stick and fell on the ground. Linghu Chong was frightened seeing this and his mind was in confusion. He saw the meditation sticks moved again and without thinking any further, he thrust his sword out.

"Zheng, zheng"

He had again hit two strategic points on the iron monk's body. But even though these two thrust were perfect and wonderful, they only managed to scrape away the rust on the iron monk's chest and lower abdomen. He heard the wind whistled on top of his head as a meditation stick was smashing down on him. Linghu Chong was greatly alarmed and quickly avoided the strike. But another meditation stick was striking out from the left side of his body. Suddenly, everything turned dark and he couldn't see anything anymore. It was because the four fire sticks that the Peach Valley Six Fairies were carrying were thrown to the ground as they started to fight the iron monks. These fire sticks were made from the legs of a table. They were able to burn easily when they were being carried by hands. But when dropped on the ground, they got extinguished in a short time. When Linghu Chong first rushed forward, three of the fire sticks were already extinguished. Right when he was avoiding that strike, the fourth fire stick was extinguished. He was helpless as he couldn't see anything in that hole. He felt pain shooting up on his left shoulder and dropped down onto the ground. He heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies calling out one after another: "Ayo!" "Hng!" "My mommy!" as they were also hit and dropped to the ground.

Linghu Chong was staying down and he heard behind him the "hu, hu" sound of the sticks sweeping over. He was terrified feeling like he was in a nightmare and was completely powerless. But not long after, the sound of the meditation sticks splitting the air was getting lighter and lighter. Until finally, he heard a "ji, ji, ge, ge" sound. The sticks had finally stopped and the iron monks returned to their original positions.

Suddenly, the area around him was bright and he heard a person calling out, "Master Linghu, are you here?"

Linghu Chong was happy to hear his voice and quickly called out, "I'm... I'm here..." But he didn't dare to move and lay still on the ground. He heard the footsteps of a few people entering the hole and approaching him. He heard Ji Wushi uttered in amazement.

"Don't... don't come over... mechanism... mechanism is really fierce," Linghu Chong warned them.

Ji Wushi was worried when Linghu Chong had not come back yet after a long time. So he went out with more than ten men to search for him. In the Da Mo room, they found the entrance to the hole. They were astonished to see Linghu Chong and the Peach Valley Six Fairies lying on the ground with blood all over them.

"Master Linghu, what happened?" Zu Qianqiu called out.

"Stay there, don't move. One move and you'll trigger the mechanism," Linghu Chong said.

"Yes! How about if I use a soft whip to drag all of you out?" Zu Qianqiu asked.

"That's the best way," Linghu Chong answered.

Zu Qianqiu flung his soft whip out and coiled it around Peachtree Branch Fairy's left leg. He dragged Peachtree Branch Fairy out of there. Peachtree Branch Fairy was the closest one to him so Zu Qianqiu dragged him out first. He then flung his whip and wrapped it around Linghu Chong's right leg. "Sorry for the offence!" He dragged him out. Using this method, he dragged all of them out one by one without triggering the mechanism.

Linghu Chong falteringly stood up and hastily went to look at the Peach Valley Six Fairies. The six people's shoulders, heads, and backs were hit by the meditation sticks. Luckily, they had thick skins and flesh along with their deep internal energies to resist the hits. So they only received flesh wounds. Peachtree Root Fairy was already bragging, "These iron monks are good, but the Peach Valley

Six Fairies broke them already." Peachtree Flower Fairy felt that it was inappropriate to claim this achievement for themselves only so he said, "Master Linghu also worked hard, but he didn't work as hard as us six brothers."

Linghu Chong endured the pain on his shoulder and head while laughing, "Of course, who can work harder than the Peach Valley Six Fairies?"

"Master Linghu, what's this all about?" Zu Qianqiu inquired.

Linghu Chong told him what he thought. "It's very likely that Sacred Lady is being held in here. Let's think of a plan to break those iron monks."

Zu Qianqiu glared at the Peach Valley Six Fairies. "So the iron monks aren't broken yet."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy gave an excuse. "What's so hard to break those iron monks? We just didn't feel like breaking them before."

"Yeah, wherever Peach Valley Six Fairies go, there's nothing we can't destroy and there's no enemy that we can't handle," Peachtree Fruit Fairy bragged.

"We don't know how good these iron monks are. Can the Peach Valley Six Fairies rush in again to activate those machines and let us see how good they are?" Ji Wushi implored.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies had suffered under these machines before. How could they agree to this request to go in there and experience those meditation sticks again?

"Everyone, we've all seen a cat catching a mouse. But has anyone see a mouse catching a rat?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy tried to change the topic.

"We seven people saw it just then and it has really widened our eyes since we've never seen it before," Peachtree Leaf Fairy told everyone.

These six brothers had a really unique skill. When they met with a difficult problem that they had no answer to, then

they would start talking about anything and change the topic.

"Someone please go and get some big rock here. Those ones that weighed around one to two hundred catties," Linghu Chong ordered.

Three people immediately went out and brought three big rocks in. These rocks were the fake rock mountains from the Shaolin Temple's courtyard. Linghu Chong carried one rock, gathered his qi and bowled the rock forward. The rock rumbled forward triggering the mechanism and one by one the iron monks emerged from the walls. They were only able to see the shadows of the sticks moving as the iron monks started to strike downwards continuously. After a long time, the iron monks went back into the walls one after another. Everyone had now seen the dizzying speed at which those sticks were striking down and they were all at loss for words.

Ji Wushi suggested his opinion. "Master, these iron monks have some kind of trigger. The trigger applied a lot of power to turn an iron chain somewhere to move those iron men. We can roll those big rocks a few more times until the power of the trigger is exhausted then those iron monks won't be able to move anymore."

Linghu Chong wanted to get Yingying out of danger as soon as possible. "I saw that those iron monks aren't slow at all when deploying those sticks and I don't know how many times they hit each time. If we try seven or eight more rocks to exhaust the trigger then it'll be dawn already. Do any brothers have a treasured sabre or treasured sword that I can borrow?"

A person immediately stepped forward and drew his sabre out. "Chief, this sabre is really sharp."

Linghu Chong saw this person had a high nose, deep eyes, and yellow beard on his chin. It seemed that he was a person from the west region. As he took that sabre, he felt an unusually abundant cold air emanating from it. "Many

thanks! I'm going to use this treasured sabre to scrape those iron men. Please don't blame me if it's damaged."

That person laughed. "For Sacred Lady, we wouldn't regret to sacrifice our lives. The sabre is only an object, don't worry about it."

Linghu Chong nodded and strode forward purposefully. Peach Valley Six Fairies called out at the same time, "Be careful!"

Linghu Chong took another two large strides when the iron monk was triggered and a meditation stick was striking downwards towards his head. This was the third time he saw this move so he didn't need to think as he wielded his sabre slashing towards the right wrist of the iron monk. The wrist was cut easily and the iron hand along with the meditation stick dropped to the ground.

"Good sabre!" Linghu Chong praised. In the beginning, he was afraid that this sabre might not be sharp enough to cut the iron monk's wrist. But seeing how this sabre cut iron like it was mud, his spirit was roused greatly.

"Shua, shua" as he cut two more of the iron monks' wrists. He was using the sabre like it was a sword and used the moves from the "Dugu Nine Swords". The iron monks kept on coming out of the walls to attack but their wrists had already been cut and their meditation sticks had already fallen on the ground. Even though their two arms were still intact and they were still moving them around, no more meditation sticks were on their hands which made them harmless. Linghu Chong kept on going forward and the moves the iron monks used were wonderful. He secretly admired them but they were only dead objects after all. So as they used their moves, there were many flaws on them. Even after all their wrists were cut off, the trigger was still working continuously. But everything had become a waste now. The group lifted the fire sticks high above their heads to follow him and to light the way. After cutting more than a hundred iron wrists, there was no more iron monks coming out of the

wall. Someone counted and there were actually one hundred and eight iron monks. The crowd was excited and started to cheer loudly.

Linghu Chong wanted to urgently meet Yingying so he took a fire stick and rushed forward. He was being careful as he passed along in case he touches some kind of trigger. The tunnel continuously slanted downwards. After going for more than three li, the tunnel had gone past several natural caves and they didn't meet any kind of trigger. Suddenly, they saw a pale light coming from in front. Linghu Chong rushed forward and as he stepped outside, he felt that the ground was soft. He had unexpectedly stepped on a layer of snow. At the same time, a wave of cold air blew on his chest. He was unexpectedly at an empty place.

He looked at all the directions and saw the dark sky and the snow flakes falling down. He also heard the sound of water from a creek nearby. Suddenly, he felt disappointed as the tunnel wasn't going to where Yingying was being imprisoned. He heard Ji Wushi behind him said, "Everyone be quiet. Don't make any noise. It's very likely that we're at the bottom of Mount Shaoshi."

"So we've escaped from danger?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Master, in the depth of winter, the stream on the mountaintop would have no running water. It seemed that we've passed through the tunnel and arrived at the foot of the mountain."

"Yes, somehow we've stumbled into Shaolin Temple's secret tunnel," Zu Qianqiu said.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He gave the treasured sabre back to that hero from the west region and said, "Then quickly pass the word back to the main group and ask them to use the tunnel to get out."

Ji Wushi ordered tens of brothers to find out their exact location at the foot of the mountain and guard the tunnel's exit in case of the enemy attacking before all the brothers



had gone out. If the tunnel's exit was blocked before all the brothers were out, then they would all be trapped inside.

Not long after, the people finding out their exact location returned to confirm that they were at the bottom of Mount Shaoshi and they were also at the back of the mountain. If they raised their heads, they would be able to see the cloister at the top of the mountain. The group of heroes had still not escaped from danger at this moment so no one dared to speak loudly. The number of warriors coming out of the tunnel gradually increased. They were also carrying the injured and dead out with them.

Even though the group of heroes had escaped with their lives, they didn't cheer but just discussed it quietly and were all feeling happy. The Black Bear from the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert said, "Chief, those bastards still thought that we're in the temple. It would be good to attack their butt and cut off their tail. That way we can vent our anger."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy butted in, "Bastards have tails?"

"We came to Shaolin Temple to meet with Sacred Lady. But we didn't get to meet the Sacred Lady so we must continue to look for her. There's no need for more killings," Linghu Chong said.

White Bear said, "Hng, no matter what, I have to grab some of those bastards. If not then they've bullied us too much."

"Please pass this order down. Everyone go separately and if you meet anyone from the orthodox school, it's best if you don't fight with them. If anyone heard of any news of Sacred Lady then please spread it around. As long as I, Linghu Chong, am still alive, no matter what kind of difficulty or danger I have to go through, I will definitely get Sacred Lady out. Are there anymore brothers still inside the temple?" Linghu Chong announced.

Ji Wushi walked to the tunnel's exit and called out into the tunnel a few times. After waiting for some time, he called out a few more times but there was no response from inside

the tunnel. He reported, "They're all out already!" Linghu Chong's childish heart was roused, "Everyone, let's call out three times and give those orthodox school's people a fright."

Zu Qianqiu laughed, "Wonderful! Everyone follow Chief and call out loudly."

Linghu Chong used his inner energy to call out, "Everyone call out after me, one, two, three! "Wei, we've gone down the mountain already!".

"Wei, we've gone down the mountain already!" the thousands of people called out.

Linghu Chong continued, "Enjoy the snow on the mountaintop!"

"Enjoy the snow on the mountaintop!" the group of heroes called out.

Linghu Chong called out again, "The green mountains never change and the river will always flow far, till we meet again!"

"The green mountains never change and the river will always flow far, till we meet again!" the group of heroes called out loudly.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Let's go!"

Suddenly, some people called out, "You son of a turtle bastards, go to your granny."

"You son of a turtle bastards, go to your granny," the group of heroes followed.

These vulgar words were also repeated after by the crowd with their voices shaking the valley. Linghu Chong called out, "Alright, no need to call out anymore, let's go!"

The group of heroes was still excited and they also echoed him, "Alright, no need to call out anymore, let's go!"

After they had finished calling out, they saw that the mountaintop stayed calm and still. The sky was gradually becoming brighter so one by one, they started to leave. Linghu Chong thought, "Right now, the first big matter I have to do is to find out Yingying's whereabouts. Next, I have to find out who killed Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. Where should

I go to accomplish these two matters?" A thought suddenly flashed through his mind, "Shaolin monks and the orthodox school's people must know by now that we've gone down the mountain and escaped their trap. Naturally, they'll go back to the temple. Maybe they brought Yingying with them. To do these two matters, I have to go back to Shaolin." He thought further, "The less people going back to Shaolin temple the better. I can't let Ji Wushi and the rest of them follow me back."

He went to Ji Wushi, Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, Blue Phoenix, Huang Boliu, and the rest of them to say, "Everyone worked hard. We'll celebrate after we've met Sacred Lady."

"Master, where are you going?" Ji Wushi asked.

"Please forgive little brother. I can't say where I'm going for now. I'll tell you everything later," Linghu Chong said.

They all didn't dare to ask anymore and one by one said their goodbyes to him.

# **Chapter 27: Three Fights**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**



**Great Master Fangzheng's hand moves were completely unpredictable. Every time when he struck out, while the hand was still on the way to the target, it had already switched into several positions. Ren Woxing's hand moves were quite simply. When he struck out or pull the hand back, it always looked stiff.**

Linghu Chong leapt into the forest and went up a tree concealing himself among the tree's dense leaves. After a long time, the sound of those heroes gradually disappeared, and finally, everything was quiet. He thought everyone must have gone already when he slowly walked back to the tunnel's exit. As he expected, there was no one there. The exit of the tunnel was concealed by two large rocks and long grass. For someone who didn't know of the existence of this tunnel, even if he stood besides it, he probably still would not be able to discover it.

Linghu Chong quickly re-entered the tunnel and ran back to the temple. When he arrived at the Da Mo hall, he heard the sound of people talking from the front hall. It was the orthodox schools' people carefully and slowly searching for traps. Linghu Chong gathered his power into both of his arms and pushed the statue of Da Mo back into its place. After putting the statue back, he considered, "Where can I go to eavesdrop on the gathering of the orthodox schools' leaders to find out the whereabouts of Yingying? Shaolin temple has more than a thousand rooms and I don't even know which room they're going to use."

He remembered that day when Great Master Fangsheng led him to see the Abbot. Great Master Fangsheng took him to the Abbot's mediation room, which he could still vaguely remember the direction to. He quickly went out of the Da Mo Hall and went on the path towards the back. But Shaolin temple had so many rooms that after going for a while, he was still unable to find the Abbot's meditation room.

He was in a sitting room at the side of a hall when he heard footsteps approaching. Linghu Chong quickly took a look around the hall and saw that there was nowhere for him to hide. But there was a wooden signage suspended on top of the hall with the gold letter writing of "Refreshing Realm". So he leapt up and hid behind the wooden signage. The footsteps gradually got nearer; and seven to eight people entered the hall.

One person said, "Those demons' skills are not bad. We surrounded them from all directions like an iron pail but they still escaped down the hill."

"It seems that there's a secret tunnel from the top of the mountain going all the way to the bottom. Otherwise, how could they have managed to escape?" Another person replied.

"I don't think there's any tunnel here. I've been in this temple for more than twenty years already, but I've never heard of any secret tunnel going down to the bottom of the mountain," another person added.

"It's called a secret. Of course not many people know about it," one of the earlier person said.

"I may have not known about it, but wouldn't our Abbot know? If there were a secret tunnel in this temple, my humble temple's Abbot would have ordered one of the schools to guard it. Why would we allow those demons to escape?" that Shaolin monk said.

All of a sudden, Linghu Chong heard one of the person shouted, "Who's there? Come out!"

Linghu Chong was greatly startled. "Did he discover my footprints?" Just as he was about to jump down, he suddenly heard the sound of laughter from behind a wooden signage on the east side of the hall. "Old man breathed too deeply and blew some dust down, and you guys actually saw it. Hey, you have very good vision." The voice was clear and loud. It was Xiang Wentian's voice.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. "So it's big brother Xiang hiding here. He held his breath really well. I've been here for so long but I didn't hear anything. If it wasn't for the dust falling down, that person wouldn't have perceived..."

Just then, his thoughts were interrupted by two "ta, ta" sounds. Two people had jumped down from the sides of that east signage at the same time. This was followed by three people crying out, "What..." "You..." "Who..." These three people only managed to utter one word before they were muted. Linghu Chong couldn't stand it anymore. He poked his head out to take a look. He saw two dark shadows flying around in the big hall, one person was Xiang Wentian, and the other person had a big and tall stature. He was Ren Woxing. These two people noiselessly struck out with their palms. With every palm strike, a person fell down on the floor. In a short time, eight people had fallen on the hall's floor. Among them, five people were facing the ground while the other three were facing up. Their eyes were wide open and they looked terrified. Their faces twitched once before they became motionless. It was obvious that they had died violently under the hands of these two people, Ren and Xiang.

Ren Woxing wiped his hands on the side of his body. "Ying'er, come down!"

A person floated down from behind the eastern wooden signage appearing graceful and elegant. It was really Yingying, the person whom he had not seen for many days. She was wearing a coarse gown and her face was looking feeble. Linghu Chong felt giddy looking at her. He really wanted to leap down and meet her but Ren Woxing waved his hands a few times towards his hiding place.

Linghu Chong thought, "They arrived here first. So they naturally know that I'm hiding behind this wooden signage. Mr. Ren is telling me not to come out, what's his idea?"



But in an instant later, he understood Ren Woxing's idea. He saw a few people rushing through the door to come into the hall. With a glance, he saw his Master and Master-Wife along with the Shaolin Abbot Fangzheng and many other people. He didn't dare to look anymore and quickly pulled his head back behind the wooden signage. His heart skipped a beat as he thought, "Yingying and the rest of them had been surrounded. I... even if my body were grounded to dust and my bones broken to pieces, I have to help them escape from danger." He heard Great Master Fangzheng said, "Amitufo! You, three honourables, have very fierce palms. The female honourable had already departed Shaolin, why did you come back again? These two people must be Dark Wood Cliff's masters. Forgive old monk for not recognising."

"This person is Divine Sun Moon Sect's Chief Ren. I'm Xiang Wentian," Xiang Wentian introduced. The two of them had very high reputations. When Xiang Wentian mentioned their two names, many people in the hall exclaimed their surprise.

"So it's Chief Ren and Left Protector Xiang. I've been looking up to your names for a long time already. What lessons do you have to teach me by coming here?" Fangzheng said.

"Old man hadn't paid attention to worldly matters for a long time so I don't recognise many of the promising youths in Jianghu of this generation. I don't know who these little friends are," Ren Woxing said.

"Let old monk introduces them to you. This Taoist is Wudang School's headmaster, his name is Chongxu," Fangzheng said.

An elder spoke out, "Poor Taoist is perhaps a few years older than Mr. Ren. But when I took over the leadership of Wudang School, Mr. Ren had already retreated in secret from Wulin. Youth is youth but this word 'promising', you're flattering me, hehe."

When Linghu Chong heard this elder's voice, he thought, "The voice of this Wudang School's leader sounds familiar." Another thought quickly followed. "Ayo! I met three people at the foot of Mount Wudang. One was carrying firewood, one was carrying vegetable, and the other one was an old man riding a donkey who possesses a wonderful sword art. So he's actually the headmaster of Wudang School." Suddenly, a good feeling rushed forth in his heart and his hands started to sweat. Wudang School and Shaolin School had been famous for several hundred years. One had soft movements and the other had hard movements, but each had their own specialties. Priest Chongxu's sword art was wonderful and esteemed. He was delighted when he suddenly learned that he had unexpectedly defeated Priest Chongxu.

He then heard Ren Woxing said, "This big leader Zuo, we've met before. Master Zuo, these last few years, your 'Great Songyang Divine Palm' must've improved by a lot, right?"

Linghu Chong was again startled. "So Songshan School's leader, martial uncle Zuo, is also here." He then heard a person said coldly, "I heard Mr. Ren was imprisoned by your own subordinate and was in hibernation for many years. Congratulations on coming out again. I haven't used this 'Great Songyang Divine Palm' for many years now. I'm afraid I've probably forgotten half of it."

Ren Woxing laughed. "How can Jianghu be that lonely? When old man was hidden away, there's no one else who can trade palms with brother Zuo. What a pity, what a pity."

"In Jianghu, there are many people with martial art equal to Mr. Ren, such as Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. But we can't just go around asking for a lesson without any reason at all," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Very well. If there's some free time, let me try out your new moves."

"I'll certainly accompany you."

Hearing these two people speaking to each other, it was obvious that they had fought before. But who won or lost, they could not tell from just hearing what these two people were saying. Great Master Fangzheng continued with his introduction. "This person is Taishan School's headmaster, Priest Tianmen. This person is Huashan School's headmaster, Mr. Yue. This person is Madam Yue, back then she was known as Heroine Ning. Mr. Ren must have heard of her."

"I already know of Huashan School's Heroine Ning. But this Mr. Yue whatever, I've never heard of him before."

Linghu Chong was displeased. "My Master's name was known before Master-Wife's. If he said that he doesn't know them both then that's fine. But there's no one who only knows Heroine Ning but doesn't know Mr. Yue. He was imprisoned under the West Lake for close to ten years. Before that time, my master's name was already known throughout the realm. It's obvious that he's doing this on purpose to provoke my Master."

Yue Buqun indifferently replied, "Junior's name is lowly. It would insult Mr. Ren's ears to hear my name."

"Mr. Yue, I'd like to ask you about a person. I don't know if you know of his whereabouts. I heard that he was formerly under your Huashan School," Ren Woxing said.

"Who's Mr. Ren asking for?"

"This person's martial art is extremely high. His conduct is also very rare in this world. My heart was blind before and was actually jealous of him so I kicked him out. But he actually felt like an old friend to me when I first met him. Now, I wholeheartedly want to betroth my darling daughter to him..."

When Linghu Chong heard him saying this, his heart started to thump loudly. He felt that something big was going to happen soon. He heard Ren Woxing continued, "This youth has passion and righteousness. When he heard that my darling daughter was being imprisoned in Shaolin temple, he led a few thousand heroes to come to Shaolin to greet his

wife. But I don't know his whereabouts now and it's making me very anxious. It's for this reason that I'm asking you about it."

Yue Buqun looked towards the sky and laughed. "Mr. Ren is very resourceful. How come you've lost your own son-in-law? This youth Mr. Ren is talking about, is he that little thief Linghu Chong who was expelled from my humble school?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "I clearly saw a piece of jade but you saw gravels. Old brother, your vision has become really poor. This youth I'm talking about really is Linghu Chong. Haha, you scolded him as little thief, doesn't this mean that you're scolding me as an old thief?"

Yue Buqun sternly replied, "This little thief's conduct is very inappropriate and he has a weakness for women. Just because of one woman, he roused groups of unorthodox sects, foxes and dogs, and come to Shaolin temple causing a lot of disturbance. If it weren't for Songshan's martial brother Zuo's arrangements, this thousand year old temple would've been burned to the ground. This would've been a big sin that even a thousand deaths wouldn't have been able to atone. This little thief was indeed part of my Huashan School before, but unfortunately, I didn't teach him enough manners. Now, he's shaming everyone."

Xiang Wentian hastily replied, "Mr. Yue is wrong! Brother Linghu came to Shaolin just to meet lady Ren and not to absurdly cause a disturbance. You go and have a look. So many friends were in Shaolin temple for one day and one night, but did they burn a single piece of grass or tree? They didn't even eat a single grain of rice and they also didn't even drink a mouthful of water."

Suddenly someone interrupted, "Shaolin temple has instead gained many items when these swine and dog friends came here."

Linghu Chong heard the sharp voice of this person and recognised him to be the Qingcheng School's headmaster Yu Canghai. He thought, "So this person has also come."

"May I ask Priest Yu, what has Shaolin temple gained?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"Cow shit, horse piss. Everywhere on the ground is full of yellow stuff." Yu Canghai answered. A few people laughed hearing this but Linghu Chong felt apologetic. "I only restricted those brothers not to damage anything but I didn't ask them not to urinate on the ground. Those crude people just pulled their pants down and pee everywhere and soiled the clean ground of the temple."

Great Master Fangzheng said, "When Master Linghu led so many people to come to Shaolin, old monk was really worried that this temple would be burned down. But when those friends were in Shaolin, not a single thing was damaged. This must be because of Master Linghu's merciful heart restricting these people. Everyone from the temple is really appreciative towards him. When I meet Master Linghu in the future, I will thank him wholeheartedly. Mr. Xiang, never mind about what Priest Yu said."

Xiang Wentian praised, "So there's actually an eminent monk here who is very open minded and very different from other people. Compared to hypocrites and really small-minded people, he's completely different."

Fangzheng continued, "Old monk doesn't understand one matter here. How did Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai die in my humble temple?"

"Ah!" Yingying exclaimed in surprise. Her voice trembled as she asked, "What... what? Dingxian, Dingyi Shi Tai... died?"

"That is so. We found their bodies inside the temple. Their time of deaths is around the time that those many Jianghu friends entered the temple. Could it be that Master Linghu didn't restrict his subordinates and the two Shi Tai were outnumbered and lost their lives here? Amitufo, amitufo," Fangzheng let out a long sigh after saying this.

"This... this is really strange. That day I met with the two Shi Tai in the hall behind the temple. Because of Abbot's

merciful heart and the two Shi Tai, you agreed to release me." Yingying said.

Linghu Chong's heart swelled with gratitude towards the two Shi Tai but he also felt sad at the same time. "The two Shi Tai pleaded for Abbot's mercy and Abbot actually released Yingying out of the temple. But the two of them lost their lives because of this. They've died because of Yingying and me. But who are their murderers? I must seek revenge for them." He heard Yingying said, "These last few days, many friends from Jianghu had come here to rescue me and make some disturbance at Shaolin temple. But more than a hundred of them were captured by the Shaolin temple. Great Master Abbot is merciful and talked to them about the ten heavenly ways, hoping that they would turn from their violent ways before they were released. But I was already imprisoned for a long time so I was allowed to go earlier."

"This Great Master Fangzheng is really a good person but he's slightly pedantic. How can Yingying's subordinates turn from their violent ways after just hearing you talk to them about the ten heavenly ways?" Linghu Chong thought.

He heard Yingying continued, "I have so much gratitude towards the two Shi Tai. After thanking Great Master Abbot, I accompanied them down Mount Shaoshi. On the third day, I heard Linghu... Master Linghu was leading friends from Jianghu to come to Shaolin temple to meet me. Dingxian Shi Tai said: "We must travel at twice the speed to intercept those people in order to avoid disturbing the eminent monks in Shaolin temple." That night, we met a friend from Jianghu. He said that people were coming from all directions and have decided to gather at Shaolin on the fifteenth of the twelfth month. The two Shi Tai discussed this and said that Jianghu's good and bad warriors of outstanding abilities are mixing together. Furthermore, they were all coming from all directions. So it might happen that not everyone would listen to Master Linghu's order. So Dingxian Shi Tai instructed me to go catch up and meet with him... Master Linghu, and ask

everyone to disperse while the two Shi Tai would go back to Shaolin to lend their help to Great Master Abbot."

She said all this clearly and elegantly. When she was speaking of the two Shi Tai, there was a hint of sadness in her voice. When she was speaking of 'Master Linghu', she couldn't cover up her bashfulness. Linghu Chong's heart was thumping hearing all these from behind the wooden signage.

"Amitufo! Old monk appreciates the two Shi Tai's good intention. When news of the difficulty facing the Shaolin temple spread, all the orthodox schools, whether they knew what the difficulty was or not, came to help. My humble school doesn't know how to repay them for all their efforts. Luckily, we didn't fight and avoided a bloodbath. Ai, the two Shi Tai understood the Buddhist teachings very well. They were kind and merciful. We've now lost two eminent people of our Buddhist faith. What a pity, what a pity," Fangzheng said.

Yingying continued, "After I parted ways with the two Shi Tai, I was overwhelmed by sheer number and was captured by Mr. Zuo's Songshan School on that same night. I was then imprisoned for a few days before daddy and uncle Xiang came and rescued me. By then, those friends from Jianghu have already entered the Shaolin temple, so the three of us went to Shaolin temple to find them. We've been here for around an hour but didn't know where everyone had gone to. We also didn't know that the two Shi Tai had died."

"If that's the case, then the two Shi Tai were not harmed by Mr. Ren or Left Protector Xiang," Fangzheng said.

"I'm indebted to the two Shi Tai for rescuing me and I only have gratitude towards them. If my daddy and uncle Xiang had met with the two Shi Tai and had a disagreement, I would have definitely mediated between them. There's no way that I would just stand by and do nothing," Yingying said.

"Well said," Fangzheng complimented.

Suddenly Yu Canghai interrupted, "Devil Sect's people's conducts are usually opposite to that of other people. Common people returns kindness with kindness. But the disciples of those demons repay kindness with enmity."

"That's strange, very strange! When did Priest Yu join the Divine Sun Moon Sect?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"What? Who said I joined the Devil Sect?" Yu Canghai replied indignantly.

"You said my divine sect's people repay kindness with enmity. Escort leader Lin from Fujian's Fortune Prestige Escort House assisted with the lives of your household. Every year they sent ten thousand silver taels to you. But your Qingcheng School repaid them by killing escort leader Lin. Priest Yu's reputation for repaying kindness with enmity is well known throughout the world. No one in the world doesn't know about this. So given your conduct, Headmaster Yu must be a member of my sect then. Very good, very good, welcome to the sect," Xiang Wentian remarked.

"Nonsense, don't fart here!" Yu Canghai was livid.

"I was sincere in my welcome but Priest Yu is scolding me of farting. If this is not repaying kindness with enmity, then what is it called? So, it's clear that rivers and mountains can be easily changed but character is hard to change. When one person repays kindness with enmity for his whole life, then his speech and action clearly shows this," Xiang Wentian said.

Fangzheng was afraid that they would get into a fight over this senseless dispute. He said, "We should ask Master Linghu who killed the two Shi Tai. This will make things come to light. But the three of you have come to Shaolin temple and killed eight disciples of the orthodox schools. Why did you do this for?"

"Old man has always wandered Jianghu by myself and no one has dared to be rude towards me. These eight people shouted at old man here telling me to come out from my



hiding place. Don't they deserve to be killed for this?" Ren Woxing asked.

"Amitufo, so it was only because they shouted at you that you violently killed them. Isn't that too much?" Fangzheng said.

Ren Woxing laughed before answering, "Great Master Abbot said that it's too much then it's too much. You didn't give my daughter any more trouble so old man has received your compassion in that regard. At first I came here to thank you so I don't want debate with you this time. So there's no need to say thanks anymore now, let's just call it even between us."

"Since Mr. Ren already said that we're even, then we're even. But the three of you have come to my humble temple and killed eight people. What should we do about this matter?"

"What's there to decide? My Sun Moon Sect has a lot of disciples and you have skills. Just kill eight of them."

"Amitufo. Killing people carelessly is a very big sin. Headmaster Zuo, from these eight people who were killed, two of them were from your respectable school. What do you think we should do?"

Zuo Lengchan had not said anything when Ren Woxing hurriedly said, "I killed those people. Why did you have to ask other people what to do and not ask me? Listening to your tone, it sounds as if you're relying on the superiority in numbers to kill the three of us. Isn't this right?"

"How would I dare to do that? It's just that Mr. Ren has come out again and this will make Jianghu very eventful. I'm afraid countless number of people will lose their lives under Mr. Ren's hands. Old monk has this thought to keep the three of you in my humble temple to read Buddhist scriptures so there would be peace in Jianghu. What do the three of you think of this?"

Ren Woxing looked up towards the sky and laughed loudly. "Wonderful, wonderful, this idea is brilliant."

"When your daughter resided at the back of my humble temple, everyone in this temple treated her with respect and she didn't lack for anything. Old monk kept your daughter here but not because I wanted to avenge the disciples of my school who were killed. Ai, revenge breeds revenge, you'll get entangled endlessly. How can a Buddhist disciple act like that? The few disciples of Shaolin School who were killed by your daughter's hands; maybe this was revenge from the previous life. But... but she's very vicious and kills people easily. If she can stay in my humble temple to cultivate her mind and grow her soul, then that would be to the benefit of everyone."

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "In that case, Great Master Abbot's intention was good then."

"That is so. But old monk didn't anticipate that this matter would unexpectedly lead to a great disturbance in Jianghu. Also, that day your daughter carried young hero Linghu on her back to the temple to seek help. She said that if old monk agrees to save young hero Linghu's life then she would be willing to repay the killing of the temple disciples with her own life. Old monk told her that there was no need for her to repay with her life, but she must stay in seclusion on top of Mount Shaoshi, and she can't leave the mountain without old monk's permission. She immediately agreed to this. Miss Ren, is what I said true?" Fangzheng said.

Yingying answered quietly, "It's true."

Linghu Chong's heart swelled with gratitude when he heard the story of that day told from the Great Master Abbot's own mouth. Even though he had heard this story from other people before, it was very different hearing it directly from Great Master Fangzheng's own mouth. Also, hearing how Yingying undertook this matter by herself, he couldn't help his eyes becoming moist from tears.

Yu Canghai laughed coldly. "So it was all because of love. But it's a pity this Linghu Chong's conduct is very lacking. During that time in Hengshan, I saw it with my own eyes how

he went to the brothel to sleep with prostitutes. Ai, he has really let down young lady Ren's affection."

Xiang Wentian laughingly asked, "So Priest Yu was inside the brothel observing all this and can't possibly be wrong?"

"Of course, how can I be wrong?"

Xiang Wentian lowered his voice and said, "Priest Yu, so you often visit brothels just like I do. Who's your favourite in that brothel? Is she pretty?"

Yu Canghai was furious. "Bullshit, bullshit!"

"It stinks, it stinks!" Xiang Wentian smiled.

"Mr. Ren, if the three of you agree to stay secluded on Mount Shaoshi then everyone here will turn from enemies into friends. So long as the three of you do not go down the mountain, old monk will guarantee that no one will bother the three of you. From this time onwards, you will enjoy complete happiness. Wouldn't this be a great happiness for everyone?" Fangzheng said.

Linghu Chong heard utmost sincerity in Great Master Fangzheng's speech. He thought, "This eminent monk doesn't understand worldly matters at all and he's also being very unrealistic. These three people kill people without even blinking and you want them to voluntarily be restrained on Mount Shaoshi? You must be dreaming."

Ren Woxing smiled slightly and said, "Abbot's idea is very good and you have also thought of this from all aspects. The right way is for me to follow this idea."

Fangzheng was happy to hear this. "Then 'shi zhu' is willing to stay on Mount Shaoshi?" [31](#)

"Right," Ren Woxing answered.

"Then old monk will prepare the rooms. From now on, the three of you are Shaolin Temple's honoured guests," Fangzheng said happily.

"But we can only stay here for six hours and no longer than that," Ren Woxing added.

Fangzheng was greatly disappointed to hear this. "Six hours? What's the use then?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "Originally, I wanted to stay here for many days and linger with all the friends here. But my name's not good and there's nothing I can do about that."

Fangzheng was stupefied as he asked, "Old monk doesn't understand. What's shi zhu's name got to do with it?"

Ren Woxing explained, "My surname isn't good. My given name is also not good. My surname is Ren and I'm called Woxing. If I've known about this earlier, then I would've been called Nixing and it would've been more convenient. But I'm already called Woxing, so I'm forced to do as I please. Wherever I want to go then that's where I'll be going to."<sup>32</sup>

Fangzheng angrily said, "So Mr. Ren was making fun of old monk."

"I don't dare, I don't dare. Within the world's highly skilled martial artists, there are only a few people that I admire. Counting the numbers, there are only three and a half. Great monk is one of them. Also there are three and a half people that old man doesn't admire," Ren Woxing said. He said all this heartily without a hint of ridicule in his voice.

"Amitufo, old monk doesn't deserve it."

Linghu Chong became really curious when he heard him say that within the world's highly skilled martial artists, there were three and a half that he admired and there were three and a half that he didn't admire. He wanted to know who Ren Woxing would point out. Besides Fangzheng, who are the rest of the people?

He heard a person with a loud booming voice asked, "Mr. Ren, who else do you admire?"

After Fangzheng introduced the Yue Buqun couple to Ren Woxing, both parties started to argue non-stop so there was no opportunity to introduce the rest of the people. Counting the breathings of the people underneath, Linghu Chong guessed that there were ten people altogether in Fangzheng's group. Besides Great Master Fangzheng, Master, Master-Wife, Priest Chongxu, Zuo Lengchan, Priest Tianmen,

and Yu Canghai, there were still three other people. He didn't know whom this booming voice belonged to.

Ren Woxing laughed. "I'm really sorry but you're not in it Sir."

That person replied, "How would I dare to stand shoulder to shoulder with Great Master Fangzheng? Naturally, I'll be one of the people Mr. Ren doesn't admire."

"You're also not one of the three and a half people I don't admire. If you practise your martial art for thirty more years, then maybe you'll become one of the people I don't admire."

That person uttered a "hey" and stopped talking. Linghu Chong thought, "You want to be one of the people not admired, but it's not that easy."

"Mr. Ren's opinion is very novel," Fangzheng said.

"Great monk, do you want to know who I admire and who I don't admire?" Ren Woxing asked.

"I will listen to shi zhu's enlightening words."

"Great monk, your study in Tendon Altering Sutra is profound and your internal energy has also reached the top. But your heart is still kind and modest, unlike old man here clamouring around Jianghu. That's why I admire you," Ren Woxing explained.

"I don't deserve it," Fangzheng said.

"But among the people that I admire, great monk isn't number one. The number one person that I admire in Wulin is the person who usurped the chief position of my Divine Sun Moon Sect. This person is Dongfang Bubai."

Everyone uttered an "ah". Obviously this was beyond their expectation. Luckily, Linghu Chong managed to stop himself from uttering his "ah". But he was thinking in his heart why Ren Woxing would regard Dongfang Bubai as the top person he admired. Dongfang Bubai imprisoned him for many years so of course he must hate Dongfang Bubai to the bone. But who would have thought that he admired Dongfang Bubai?

"Old man's martial art is already very high, I also have a very keen mind, and it's known in the realm that I have no match in this world. But I was unexpectedly fooled by Dongfang Bubai's sweet talk and as a result was buried underneath a lake. Dongfang Bubai is such a fierce person, how could old man dare not to admire him?"

"So that's how it is," Fangzheng remarked.

"The third person that I admire is the top master of Huashan School at the moment," Ren Woxing said.

This was really beyond Linghu Chong's expectation. When Ren Woxing was talking to Yue Buqun before, he didn't even give him any face. Who would've thought that inside his heart, Ren Woxing would actually admire Yue Buqun?

Madam Yue said, "You don't need to say these false talks and ridicule people."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Haha, Madam Yue, you thought that the person I was referring to was your husband? He... he lacks by a lot. The person I admire has a godly sword art. He's Feng Qingyang. Mr. Feng's sword art is much higher compared to me and I wouldn't be able to reach that stage at all. I sincerely admire him."

"Mr. Yue, is Mr. Feng still alive?" Fangzheng asked.

"Martial uncle Feng went into... into seclusion for tens of years already and we've never heard news of him ever since. If he's still alive then that would be a big fortune for our school," Yue Buqun said.

Ren Woxing laughed coldly. "Mr. Feng is from the sword branch and you're from the qi branch. These two branches of sword and qi can't co-exist together in the Huashan School. If Mr. Feng is still alive, why would it be so fortunate for you?"

Yue Buqun just stayed silent after he was reprimanded by Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong had guessed before that Feng Qingyang was from the sword branch. When he heard what Ren Woxing said and how his master didn't dispute it, he no longer doubted it. Ren Woxing laughed. "Don't worry. Mr. Feng is a

highly skilled person outside of Wulin. Do you think he still needs your Huashan School's leadership and would take over your throne?"

"I'm just a dumb person. If martial uncle Feng can give me some guidance then it would make me very happy. Mr. Ren, if you can point me to the direction where I can pay a visit to martial uncle Feng, then the Huashan School will appreciate your kindness," Yue Buqun said with apparent sincerity.

"One, I don't know where Mr. Feng is. Two, even if I know, I wouldn't tell you. A frontal attack is easily avoided but a stab in the back is hard to protect against. A real villain is easy to cope with but a hypocrite will give a lot of headache," Ren Woxing said.

Yue Buqun did not speak anymore.

Linghu Chong thought, "My master is a refined gentleman and doesn't want to speak vulgarly towards Mr. Ren."

Ren Woxing turned towards Wudang School's leader Priest Chongxu and said, "The fourth person that old man admire is this old ox-nosed priest. Your Wudang School's Taiji Sword is wonderful. You also exercise self control to protect yourself from immorality and stay away from many idle matters in Jianghu, but you don't know how to teach to your disciples. Wudang School has no one of potential and if you wait till you die then Taiji Sword Art would be lost forever. Also, even though your Taiji Sword Art is high, you might not win against old man. That's why I only admire you one half."

Priest Chongxu laughed. "I'm actually admired by Mr. Ren by one half, this is already giving me a lot of face. Many thanks!"

"No need to be so polite," Ren Woxing said. He then turned his head towards Zuo Lengchan. "Great leader Zuo, you don't need to keep that smile on your face when you're actually feeling angry. While you're not one of the people I

admire, you're one of the three and half people that I don't admire. You're number one in this list."

Zuo Lengchan laughed. "I feel extremely flattered."

"Your martial art is sufficient and your scheming is very deep, very suitable to my taste. You want to annex the five mountains sword schools and to stand as an equal with Shaolin and Wudang. You have really high fantasy. But your movements are very suspicious and you planned all sort of conspiracies and deceptions. This is not the behaviour of a hero. That's why I have absolutely no admiration for you," Ren Woxing explained.

Zuo Lengchan replied, "From the three and a half people that I don't admire in this world, you're only one half."

Ren Woxing continued, "All you can do is copy other people's ideas and have no thought of your own; so that's why no one admires you. Even though your study of Songshan School's martial art is profound, everything was passed down by the people before you. If you have to depend on just your own ability, I'm afraid even after many years, we won't be able to see any new moves in the martial art."

Zuo Lengchan uttered an "Hng" before coldly laughing. "Sir, you're talking here and there. Are you just dragging along the time or are you actually waiting for help to arrive?"

Ren Woxing laughed coldly. "The way you said this; are you still relying on numbers to besiege the three of us?"

Zuo Lengchan said, "You've come to Shaolin and killed many people here. Today, if you think you can still retreat with your whole body intact, then you're looking down at everyone here. You said we're relying on numbers to win, that's alright. If you want to say that we're not following Wulin's customs, that's also alright. You've already killed some disciples of the Songshan School. Since Zuo Lengchan is here today, I want to see how good you really are."

Ren Woxing turned toward Fangzheng and asked, "Great Master Abbot, is this Shaolin temple or Songshan School's courtyard?"



"Shi zhu is still asking even though you already know. Of course, it's Shaolin temple here," Fangzheng answered.

"Then, concerning this matter, is Shaolin's Abbot presiding over it or Songshan School's headmaster presiding over it?" Ren Woxing asked.

"Although old monk is presiding over this matter, if any of the friends here has any esteemed opinion then old monk will definitely listen to it," Fangzheng said.

Ren Woxing looked up the sky and laughed heartily. "Good, it's really an esteemed opinion to know that you'll lose if you fight alone so you have to gang up to fight us.

Zuo, you're blocking me here today. I don't need to fight you, I'll just cut my own throat to commit suicide in front of you."

Zuo Lengchan said coldly, "We have ten people here. We might not be able to stop you here but to kill your daughter won't be hard to do."

"Amitufo, you can't kill her," Fangzheng said.

Linghu Chong's heart started thumping wildly. He knew that Zuo Lengchan was saying the truth. Although he didn't know who the other three people were, he thought that their position must be similar to Fangzheng or Chongxu. Even if they were not a leader of a school, they would still be elite masters. Ren Woxing's martial art was powerful and at worst, he would escape injured. But it was hard to say whether Xiang Wentian would be able to escape with his life. As for Yingying, she would have no hope.

Ren Woxing calmly said, "That's wonderful. Headmaster Zuo has a son and I heard his martial art is poor so he should be easy to kill. Gentleman Yue has a daughter. Priest Yu, I think have a few lovely concubines and three sons. Priest Tianmen has no son or daughter but has a lot of beloved disciples. Mr. Mo Da still has his old father and mother. Kunlun School's Qiankun One Sword Zhenshan Zi has one grandson. There's still Beggar Clan's big clan leader Xie. Left protector Xiang, who does clan leader Xie have?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So martial uncle Mo is also here. Actually Mr. Ren doesn't need Great Master Fangzheng's introduction. He already knew the appearances of these ten people from the beginning. Not only that, he must have been familiar with each of their life's experiences."

Xiang Wentian said, "I heard that in Beggar Clan, there are these two people called Green Lotus Emissary and White Lotus Emissary. Although they don't have the Xie surname, they're both clan leader Xie's sons."

"You're not wrong about this? We don't want to wrongly kill a good person here," Ren Woxing said.

"I'm not wrong. Subordinate already asked clearly," Xiang Wentian reassured him.

Ren Woxing nodded his head. "If we kill wrongly then it can't be helped. But if we kill thirty-four people from Beggar Clan then we'll at least kill a few people correctly."

"Chief's opinion is esteemed!" Xiang Wentian praised.

Ren Woxing had mentioned each of their loved ones. Zuo Lengchan and clan leader Xie were shivering in fear. They knew that this person was not just saying some false threat. These people here would not be able to stop him from leaving. But if they kill his daughter then he would certainly avenge her death by violently killing each of their loved ones. They were afraid that it would be very difficult for their loved ones to escape his violent hands. Thinking of this made them trembled with fear. In that moment, everything was quiet and all their faces changed colour.

After some time, Fangzheng spoke out, "Revenge will always breed revenge. Shi zhu Ren, we had decided not to harm young lady Ren, but we want you three honourables to stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

"We can't. My murderous nature has been aroused. I can't wait to kill Headmaster Zuo's son and Priest Yu's concubines and sons. Especially Mr. Yue's lovely daughter, I can't allow her to live in this world," Ren Woxing replied.

Linghu Chong was greatly alarmed. He didn't know whether this head of Devil Sect was just saying this to threaten them or he really wanted to kill them.

"Mr. Ren, why don't we gamble? What do you think of this?" Priest Chongxu asked.

"Old man's luck in gambling isn't good so I have no confidence in making a bet. But I have confidence in killing people. Killing master-hands, I don't have confidence. But killing master-hands' parents, children, big wives, or small wives, I have lots of confidence," Ren Woxing replied.

"Those people don't know martial art. Killing them isn't what heroes do."

"Even though it's not what heroes do, it would make my enemies grieve for their whole lifetime and make me really happy."

"If you don't have your daughter anymore, you also won't be happy. If you don't have your daughter then you wouldn't have your son-in-law anymore. Your son-in-law would become other people's son-in-law and you would lose your reputation."

"That can't be helped... that can't be helped. I'm forced to kill all of them. Who said that my son-in-law doesn't respect my daughter?"

"How about this? We won't rely on numbers to win and you won't carelessly kill people. We'll make it equal and let our martial arts decide the winner and loser. The three of you fight three of our people in three fights. The winner would be the one who won two fights out of three."

Fangzheng hastily said, "This is good, Brother Chongxu's esteemed opinion is really out of the ordinary. We'll just fight as necessary and there's no need to hurt anyone."

Ren Woxing asked, "If the three of us lose, then we have to stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years and aren't allowed to go down the mountain. Is this right?"

Priest Chongxu answered, "Right. If the three of you won two fights, then we have naturally lost the fight and you're

free to go down the mountain. And we'll just regard that these eight disciples have died in vain."

"In my heart, I admire you ox-nosed by one half. I feel that these words you said is half right. So who are the three people fighting for your side? Can I choose the people?" Ren Woxing inquired.

Zuo Lengchan butted in, "Great Master Abbot is the host here. So he would definitely fight. My martial art hasn't seen any use for the last ten years so I'll give it a try. And the third fight? This competition was Priest Chongxu's idea so he won't just be a spectator in this and let other people face this problem. So he has to show his Taiji Sword Art here." Although each of these ten people was not just any ordinary fighter, Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu and he himself had the highest martial arts. When he picked these three people to fight, it could be said that they were now in an invincible position. Yingying was only an eighteen to nineteen years old girl, even though her martial art was high, her cultivation of it was still limited. So no matter which school leader she fought, she was doomed to lose. Yue Buqun and the rest of the people also agreed to this method.

Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and Zuo Lengchan were the orthodox school's three top masters. Any of their martial art was unlikely to be below Ren Woxing. Compared to Xiang Wentian, they were most likely better by half a level. So they were most likely to win this best two out of three fights. Even if they had to win all three fights, they still had a fifty percent chance.

What everyone worried about was that they would fail to capture Ren Woxing and allow him to escape down the mountain. He then would violently harm each of their loved ones. So only if they fought upright and decisive battles would they have nothing to fear.

Ren Woxing said, "Best two out of three fights is inappropriate. Let's just fight one battle. You pick one person

to come out and we'll also pick one person. And just fight one fight to decide this."

"Brother Ren, if you only fight by yourself today, you'll be at a disadvantage. Not just the ten people here, even if you have three times more people, Great Master Abbot can call out twenty to thirty more masters from the Shaolin School. And we haven't even counted the number of good fighters from the other schools," Zuo Lengchan said.

"That's why you're going to rely on numbers to win," Ren Woxing sneered.

"Right, we're going to rely on numbers to win."

"How shameless!"

"Killing people for no reason is also shameless."

"Killing people must have a reason? Headmaster Zuo, do you eat meat or are you a vegetarian?"

"Hng, if I want to kill someone then I'll kill him. Why do I have to be a vegetarian?"

"Every person you killed deserved to be killed?"

"Naturally," Zuo Lengchan said confidently.

But Ren Woxing continued, "You eat cows and sheep. These cows and sheep, what kind of sins do they have?"

Great Master Fangzheng said, "Amitufo, what shi zhu Ren said is according the heart of Buddha."

"Great Master Fangzheng, don't be fooled by his words. He's saying that our eight innocent disciples are like cows and sheep," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Insects, ants, cows, sheeps, immortal Buddha, mortal people, they're all living things," Ren Woxing said.

Fangzheng again said, "Yes, yes. Amitufo."

"Brother Ren, you keep delaying this, you're afraid to fight today?" provoked Zuo Lengchan.

Ren Woxing suddenly let out a long whistle which rattled and shook all the tiles in the room. The twelve candles on the offering table dimmed. When he stopped whistling, the candles burned brightly again. Hearing his whistle, everyone

felt their hearts thumping wildly. Their faces changed colours.

Ren Woxing declared, "Alright. Zuo, let's fight."

Zuo Lengchan affirmed what was at stake. "What a gentleman said cannot be taken back. Best two out of three fights, if the three of you lost two fights then all of you must stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

"Alright! Best two out of three fights, if we lose two out of three fights then the three of us will stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

When the orthodox people heard how Ren Woxing was provoked by Zuo Lengchan into agreeing to the fight, all their faces looked happy.

Ren Woxing continued, "I'll fight you for one fight. Left protector Xiang will fight this dwarf Yu. My daughter is a female so she'll fight a woman. She'll fight heroine Ning."

Zuo Lengchan hastily said, "No. We decide ourselves who will fight for our side. How can you appoint the people for us?"

"So you must choose yourself and can't let the other party choose for you?" Ren Woxing asked.

Zuo Lengchan confirmed, "That's right. Shaolin and Wudang's big leaders. Also, add me in there."

Ren Woxing questioned, "Depending on your prestige, status and martial art, how can you be on par with Shaolin and Wudang's two big leaders?"

Zuo Lengchan uttered an "Hng" and said, "I don't dare to consider myself to be on par with Shaolin and Wudang's big leaders. But I'll manage to fight with you."

Ren Woxing laughed loudly. "Great Master Fangzheng, I want to ask you to teach me Shaolin's divine fist, you want to accompany me?"

"Amitufo, old monk hasn't practised my martial art for a long time and isn't shi zhu's match. But old monk is already here and wants to keep you on this mountain so I'll have to put my old bones through some of your punches and kicks."

Zuo Lengchan saw him unexpectedly challenge Great Master Fangzheng. He understood that he did this to scorn him. But he was actually happy that this happened. "I was originally worried that I would have to fight with him, and he would let Xiang Wentian fight Chongxu. Then he would get his daughter to fight Fangzheng. If Priest Chongxu is careless and I lost to you, it would've been disastrous." He didn't say anything anymore and stepped back a few steps. The other people moved the corpses of those eight people aside to clear the middle of the hall.

"Great Master Abbot, please." Both of Ren Woxing's sleeves were hanging down as he cupped his fist.

Fangzheng put his palms together to return the propriety. "Shi zhu, please move first."

"I'm using Sun Moon Sect's orthodox martial art. Great Master is using Shaolin School's orthodox skills. We're both using orthodox skill to fight orthodox skill, so we definitely have to go on with this fight."

Yu Canghai said, "Pei! What orthodox skills does your Devil Sect have? No shame."

"Abbot, let me kill this dwarf Yu first then I'll fight you," Ren Woxing said.

Fangzheng hastily replied, "You can't." He knew that this person's fist was like lightning and his strikes were like thunder. So he didn't tarry and immediately sent a palm out. "Shi zhu Ren, guard yourself."

This palm he sent out looked ordinary. But halfway through the strike, it suddenly swayed. The single palm suddenly turned into two palms. Two palms turned into four palms. Four palms turned into eight palms. "Thousand Hands of Rulai!" the words escaped Ren Woxing's mouth. He knew that if he was late for a bit longer, his eight palms would turn into sixteen palms and then it would continue to transform into thirty two palms. With a shout, Ren Woxing immediately sent a palm out to attack Fangzheng's right shoulder. Fangzheng shot his left palm out underneath the bottom of

his right palm. It then swayed slightly and started to transform. The shadows of the palm turned from one to two and two to four. Ren Woxing jumped up and shot out two palms of his own.

Linghu Chong peered from his vantage point to observe the fight. Great Master Fangzheng's palm moves were unpredictable. Every strike he shot out, it always changed into many different directions when it reached halfway. The palm moves were like illusions and couldn't be observed. On the other hand, Ren Woxing's palm moves were simple. When he struck out or pulled his palm back, it looked quite stiff. But no matter where Fangzheng's palm struck out, Ren Woxing would immediately follow every change and sent his palm there. Linghu Chong saw that these two people were well-matched as they fought with all their powers. His bare-fist martial art was very shallow so he was still not proficient on Dugu Nine Swords' "palm breaking stance". Thus, he was not able to see the flaws in their fist martial art and was unable to see where he could attack.

These two masters were executing the world highest and most profound palm moves. Linghu Chong was bewildered and did not understand the refined essences of the moves. "In sword art, I was victorious against Priest Chongxu and I wouldn't lose to Mr. Ren if we fight. But against these two people's palm martial art, I have to constantly attack them with a sharp sword. Grand Master uncle Feng said, I have to practise for twenty years before I can fight the world's elite masters. When he said that he was probably mainly referring to the "palm breaking stance"."

He watched for a while longer and suddenly saw Ren Woxing pushing out with both hands forcing Great Master Fangzheng to retreat three steps. Linghu Chong was alarmed. "Ayo, this is bad, Great Master Fangzheng is going to lose."

After that he saw Great Master Fangzheng's left palm drew a few circles while his right palm struck out. It struck out to the top, bottom, left, and right. After striking out a few



times, Ren Woxing retreated a step. After a few more strikes, Ren Woxing retreated a step again. Linghu Chong thought, "Good, good!" He softly let out a sigh and thought, "Why do I worry when Great Master Fangzheng is losing but become comforted when I saw him fight back? That must be it. Great Master Fangzheng is a righteous eminent monk while Chief Ren is after all a person from the unorthodox sect. My heart still distinguishes between 'good and evil' and 'right and wrong'." But he changed his mind and again thought, "But if Chief Ren lost, Yingying will be detained on Mount Shaoshi for ten years. How can that be what my heart wish for?" After a moment, he did not know himself who he really wanted to win or lose. In his heart, he secretly felt that when this Ren Woxing father, daughter and Xiang Wentian entered Jianghu, then there would be great disturbance. But in his heart, he also thought, "What's so bad about great disturbance? Wouldn't that be very lively?" He slowly swept his eyes across to look at Yingying.

She was leaning on a pillar looking very delicate and fragile. Her eyebrows were slightly wrinkled looking really worried. Suddenly, a feeling of pity flourished in Linghu Chong's heart. "How can I let her be held captive for ten years here? How can she pass through this kind of torment?" At this thought, he remembered how Yingying was willing to give her life up to save his life. Throughout his whole life, he had had many generous martial friends, but not one of them would go so far as to give their lives for him. A hot feeling started to rush forth in his chest. He did not care anymore if Yingying was the daughter of the Devil Sect's Chief or if the evil things she had done were unpardonable. He was resigned to the fact that everyone in the world would want to kill him as he decided that he was going to protect her and not let any harm come to her.

The eleven pairs of eyes in the hall were watching the fight between Great Master Fangzheng and Ren Woxing attentively. They were praising the palm moves of both

fighters in their hearts. Zuo Lengchan was relieved, "Luckily this old freak Ren picked the fight with Great Master Fangzheng. Otherwise, I wouldn't know how to handle this clumsy palm move of his. Compared to my own school's Great Songyang Divine Palm, his palm move seems to be more complicated and have more changes. His palm move is better than mine. He only attacks at a specific point and nothing else."

Xiang Wentian was thinking, "Shaolin School's martial arts have enjoyed their reputation for a thousand year. They are really no small matter. Even though Great Master Fangzheng's 'Thousand Hands of Rulai' is very complicated, its power isn't dispersed at all. This is very difficult to do. If I have to fight him, I won't be able to trade palm moves with him so I have to compare inner power with him." Yue Buqun, Yu Canghai, and the rest of the people there were also comparing their own martial arts against these two people's palm moves.

Ren Woxing had now fought for a long time. He gradually felt that Great Master Fangzheng's palm moves were getting slightly slower. He secretly felt happy. "Even though your palm move is wonderful, you're old already. It's hard to keep it up for a long time." He immediately attacked repeatedly. After his fourth strike, he felt a slight tingling on his right arm as he pulled his palm back and he felt his internal energy not working smoothly. He felt alarmed and knew that it was his own inner energy that was disturbed. He thought, "This old monk's Tendon Altering Sutra is indeed powerful. We haven't clashed palms yet but he can restrain my internal energy." He knew that if they fight longer, his opponent's abundant internal energy would eventually come out and he would be in an unfavourable position.

He saw Great Master Fangzheng's left palm struck out. With a cry, he also sent his left palm out rapidly. The two palms clashed and they both retreated a step. Ren Woxing felt that even though his opponent's internal energy was

soft, it was abundant and matchless. He also used his "Art of Essence Absorbing" but unexpectedly he could not absorb Great Master Fangzheng's internal energy at all. He was confounded.

Great Master Fangzheng said, "Well done! Well done!" and followed with his right palm striking out. Ren Woxing again struck his right palm out to meet it. Both people faltered from the impact. Ren Woxing felt his whole body shaken and immediately took two steps backwards. When his second step landed, he turned his body around and his right hand shot out and grabbed Yu Canghai's chest. Then, he raised his left hand to smash it down on Yu Canghai's head.

This situation was just like a rabbit being captured by a falcon and nobody had expected this turn of event. They all had their eyes on the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng and saw that the situation was gradually becoming disadvantageous towards Ren Woxing. Normally, he would put all his power into protecting himself. But who would have thought that he would turn around and attack Yu Canghai. This turn of event was just too strange and too quick for Yu Canghai even though he was a martial artist of the same generation. If he were to actually fight with Ren Woxing, even though he would lose at the end, he would not have been captured in just one move.

Everyone gasped in surprise while Great Master Fangzheng leapt and struck his two palms out. It was as if he was flying as he rushed at Ren Woxing aiming at the back of his head. This move was known in martial study as 'attacking the enemy's rear in order to make him give up his own attack' and the enemy would have no choice but to rescue himself. The aim of this attack was to make Ren Woxing withdraw his own attack towards Yu Canghai's head and turn around to block the incoming attack.

The other masters saw how Great Master Fangzheng shot this palm out in the blink of an eye and they were all impressed by this. But there was not enough time to cheer

although they knew that he had saved Yu Canghai's life. But no one could have guessed that when Ren Woxing withdrew his left hand, he did not try to block the strike. Instead, his left hand grabbed Great Master Fangzheng's Tanzhong acupoint while his right hand was thrust towards the chest. Great Master Fangzheng's body became immediately weak and dropped to the ground. Everyone was surprised and one by one called out as they crowded around him.

Zuo Lengchan suddenly flew out and violently shot his palm out towards Ren Woxing's back. Ren Woxing turned his hand around to strike back. He shouted at the same time, "Alright, this is the second fight." Zuo Lengchan's hand suddenly kept on changing. It changed from a fist into a palm into a stab into a grab. In a short time, it had changed more than ten times.

Even though he was repeatedly attacked, Ren Woxing was able to resist for a moment by exerting his power. He had just fought with Great Master Fangzheng. Even though the last three moves he used against the Abbot were mostly based on his ingenuity and cunning, he had still used up a lot of energy. Otherwise, how can this Shaolin School's headmaster with abundant internal energy let him grab his Tanzhong acupoint? How could he let him hit his heart with his fingers? These last few moves were done with all of his strength, as he was staking everything on this attack. As a result, Ren Woxing was victorious against Great Master Fangzheng through dishonest means. He took into account his opponent's merciful heart and immediately dashed to Yu Canghai to kill him. Firstly, the distance between that Yu person and Great Master Fangzheng was great that Great Master would not have been able to help Yu Canghai in time. Secondly, none of the other school leaders had any deep feeling towards Yu Canghai that they would brave danger and stake their lives just to save him. So the only person who would try to save Yu Canghai was Great Master Fangzheng.

When the Shaolin Abbot attacked him to free Yu Canghai, he did not try to block or parry Great Master Fangzheng's strike but seized his fatal acupoint instead. At that time, his plan reached its most dangerous point. The two palms of Great Master Fangzheng that were aiming at the back of his head did not need to actually reach his head to kill him. The wind from the palms was fully capable of bursting his skull open.

When he grabbed Yu Canghai, he had already staked his own life in this gamble. He gambled on this eminent Buddhist monk's merciful heart. When Great Master Fangzheng's two palms were about to reach the back of Ren Woxing's head, the Abbot took his palms back which left half of his body wide open. In order to take back the two palms, Great Master Fangzheng had to use the power from his whole body to do so. Even though this was done by a master, the internal energy in between the chest and stomach region was still left empty. When Ren Woxing's grab and stab had reached Great Master Fangzheng, Fangzheng had actually wanted to transfer his power into his two palms and smash Ren Woxing's head open, but the internal energy in his Dantian region was unable to go up.

Priest Chongxu hastily supported Great Master Fangzheng and opened his sealed acupoint. He sighed, "Brother Abbot is too humane and was taken advantage of by an evildoer."

"Amitufo. Shi zhu Ren's mind is very keen and he used wits instead of brawn. Old man has lost," Fangzheng said.

Yue Buqun said loudly, "Mr. Ren's conduct is traitorous and deceitful. Your win is not from upright and frank method. This is not the behaviour of an upright gentleman."

Xiang Wentian laughed. "In my Divine Sun Moon Sect, how can there be any upright gentleman? If Chief Ren is an upright gentleman, he would've followed your bad example from a long time ago. Do you think we would be having this competition now if he did?"

Yue Buqun was lost for words.

Ren Woxing was leaning his back on the wooden pillar and sluggishly striking his palm out to block every fist and kick from Zuo Lengchan. Zuo Lengchan was a proud person. If it was any other time, he would not have fought Ren Woxing after his opponent had just fought with Shaolin School's number one master. He knew that this was a cheap behaviour and not something that a master of a school would do. Instead, this behaviour was something that people would condemn. But Ren Woxing used dishonest means and took advantage of Great Master Fangzheng's kind heart to defeat him and this made everyone really angry. When Zuo Lengchan disregarded his own safety and boldly attacked, everyone there regarded that he did this because of righteous anger and did not care that he fought the enemy in succession without giving him a necessary pause. This was a once in a thousand years opportunity for Zuo Lengchan. Xiang Wentian saw that Ren Woxing did not have a chance to draw breath yet so he rushed besides the pillar. "Big leader Zuo, you're receiving such a kindness, aren't you ashamed? I'll fight with you."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "Wait till I flatten this Ren first then I'll fight you. Do you think old man here is afraid to fight you in succession?" With a shout, he struck a fist out towards Ren Woxing.

Ren Woxing lifted his left hand up and coldly said, "Brother Xiang, step back!"

Xiang Wentian knew that Chief liked to outdo others so he did not dare to disobey him. "Alright, I'll retreat for now. But this Zuo is too shameless, so I want to kick his butt." With a kick, he flew out behind Zuo Lengchan and booted at his bottom.

Zuo Lengchan was indignant. "Two against one?" He sneered as he slanted his body to avoid the kick. How could he have known that even though Xiang Wentian raised his leg, he did not kick it out. He merely raised his right leg up

and lightly moved it. When Xiang Wentian saw that Zuo Lengchan was fooled, he laughed loudly. "Bastard grandson relies on numbers to win." He then leapt back to stand besides Yingying.

As soon as he was let off, Zuo Lengchan resumed his attack against Ren Woxing. When masters fight, the difference between them would be small. When Ren Woxing was freed for a time, he drew a deep breath and regulated his qi smoothly. His vigor was greatly roused after this.

"Peng, peng, peng" as he struck three palms out. Zuo Lengchan exerted his power to protect himself and he was secretly shocked. "I haven't met this old man for more than ten years and his skill has greatly improved. I must use all of my power today if I want to win."

This was the second time these two people had fought. This fight was a fight to the death in front of the masters in Jianghu. The two of them regarded the winning and losing of this fight to be very serious unlike the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng which was peaceful.

As soon as Ren Woxing was re-energised, all his moves were killing moves. Both of his hands changed to knife-forms and he started hacking down. Zuo Lengchan kept changing his hand from fist into palm into a grab into a seize. This was the strong point of his palm move. The two people were getting quicker as they fought. Linghu Chong's eyes were just seeing patterns as he watched the fight from behind the wooden signage. When he was watching the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng, he did not understand the essences of their martial art, but he unexpectedly also did not understand the extremely fast moves from these two people.

He turned his eyes towards Yingying and noticed her snow white complexion. She had her eyes lowered and he could see her long eyelashes hanging down. There was no amazement or worry on her face. Xiang Wentian's face was sometimes happy and sometimes worried. In a moment, it

changed into doubt. In another moment, it changed into regret. Another moment, it changed into an angry glare. It was as if he was personally fighting this battle. Linghu Chong thought, "Brother Xiang's experience is much higher compared to Yingying. Looking at him being so nervous, I'm afraid it would be really hard for Mr. Ren to win this battle." He slowly turned his eyes to look at where his Master and Master-Wife were standing at. Besides them were Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. The two people behind them were Taishan School's leader Priest Tianmen and Hengshan School's leader Mr. Mo Da. Ever since Mr. Mo Da arrived inside the hall, he had not made any noise at all. When Linghu Chong saw his thin and small body, he felt warmth in his heart followed by the thought, "Martial sister Yilin and the rest of the Heng-Shan School's disciples have no more masters. I don't know how they'll cope with it." Qingcheng School's headmaster Priest Yu was standing at the back wall with his hand grasping his sword handle and was looking indignant. Standing by the west was a beggar with white hair. He was Beggar Clan's leader Xie Feng. The other person was wearing a green gown and his appearance was quite natural. He was Kunlun School's leader Qiankun One Sword Zhenshan Zi.

These nine people were the present orthodox schools' most powerful masters. If the nine of them were not fully concentrating on the fight, even if he had used all of his power to hold his breath, it was more than likely that he would have been discovered a long time ago. He thought, "The gathering below has so many masters. Especially Master and Master-Wife are also there. Then there are Great Master Fangzheng, Wudang's leader, and Mr. Mo Da, the three seniors I respect completely. But I'm being really disrespectful hiding here and eavesdropping to what they're saying. Even though I was here before them, I've eavesdropped to what they were saying. If any of them felt my presence here then I'd be really shamed."



He hoped that Ren Woxing would quickly win this fight and thus win the best two out of three fights and go down the mountain with Yingying. When Great Master Fangzheng and the rest of the masters had gone out of the hall, he would then hurry down the mountain to meet Yingying. At the thought of meeting Yingying, his chest felt hot and his ears were also feeling hot. He pondered, "From now on, are Yingying and I really going to be man and wife? She treated me with passion and righteousness, but I... but I..." These last few days, although he had been thinking of Yingying, he had always thought of protecting her because of her kindness towards him. He wanted to help her get out of her imprisonment and declare to everyone in Jianghu that it was him who adored her and that it really was not her idea. Thus, it would stop the warriors of Jianghu from ridiculing her and causing her to be embarrassed. Every time Yingying's image appeared in his mind, there was no feeling of happiness or warmth in his heart. It was very different with the feeling of warmth when he remembered his little martial sister Yue Lingshan. There was actually a bit of fear when he thought of Yingying.

When he first met Yingying, he thought that she was an old granny and he respected her and felt grateful towards her. Later, after he saw her lifted her hands to kill people and commanded those group of heroes, it was unavoidable that his respect was mixed with fear. Only after he found out recently that she had some feelings for him that this little bit of fear in his heart started to gradually lighten. And later when he found out that she was willing to give her own life to Shaolin to save him, his feelings for her became full of gratitude. But even though his feeling of gratitude was deep, he did not have any thoughts to be intimate with her and only wished that he could repay her kindness. Hearing Ren Woxing say that he was his son-in-law, he felt uneasy in his heart. Just now, when he saw her magnificent beauty, he only felt that the distance between them was far. After looking at

Yingying for a few times, he did not dare to take a look again. He saw Xiang Wentian made a fist with both of his hands and his two eyes were wide open. Xiang Wentian was looking intently at Ren Woxing and Zuo Lengchan.

He saw Zuo Lengchan had already pulled back to one corner of the hall while Ren Woxing was still hacking repeatedly. Each of his palms was like a big hatchet and the power was astonishing. Zuo Lengchan was completely in an unfavourable situation. His two arms could not attack as he kept withdrawing them as soon as they had gone out for one foot. It seemed that he was only defending and not attacking. Suddenly, Ren Woxing shouted loudly and pushed both of his palms towards Zuo Lengchan's chest. The four palms clashed and Zuo Lengchan hit the wall behind him. Dust from the top fell down from the impact. The four palms did not separate. Linghu Chong felt his body shook and it looked as if the wooden signage he was hiding behind was about to fall down. He felt alarmed. "Martial uncle Zuo is in trouble. They're both competing inner energy, Ren Woxing would use the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' to absorb his inner energy. After some time, martial uncle Zuo will definitely lose." He saw Zuo Lengchan pulled his right palm back and unexpectedly only used his left palm to resist his opponent's palm while extending two fingers in his right hand to poke Ren Woxing. Ren Woxing shouted in alarm and leapt back immediately. Zuo Lengchan stabbed again with his right hand. He successively stabbed three times and Ren Woxing stepped back three times. Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu and the rest of the people were surprised: "I've heard that Ren Woxing's 'Art of Essence Absorbing' will absorb the opponent's inner energy without exception, but how come when their four palms connected, Zuo Lengchan was unexpectedly unharmed? Could it be that his Songshan School's inner energy cultivation does not fear the 'Art of Essence Absorbing'?" All the masters looking at the fight

were in amazement but Ren Woxing was even more astonished.

More than ten years ago, when Ren Woxing fought with Zuo Lengchan, he did not have to use his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' before gaining the advantage. He was able to stop Zuo Lengchan then even though at that fight, he had a sudden pain in his heart and found it hard to control his power. He had been truly frightened as he knew it was because of the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' reversing. Under normal circumstances, he could have calmly meditated to regulate his inner energy. However, how could he do that with the enemy right in front of him? He had been at a loss as to what to do when he suddenly saw two people appearing behind Zuo Lengchan. They were Zuo Lengchan's martial brothers, "Tower Holding Palm" Ding Mian and "Great Songyang Palm" Fei Bin. Ren Woxing had immediately leapt away and laughed loudly. "We agreed to fight one on one but you secretly have some helpers. A gentleman doesn't want to be disadvantaged so I'll meet you at some other time. Today, grandpa won't accompany you anymore." If his opponent had not voluntarily ceased the fight, Zuo Lengchan's loss would have been guaranteed. It had been such a good turn of events for Zuo Lengchan that he had not dared to refute his opponent's accusation by saying something like "To have helpers is not the way of the hero". He had been afraid that Ren Woxing might have gotten angry and started fighting again. It would have been also inappropriate for Ding Mian and Fei Bin to enter the fight and help as it could have ruined his good reputation. Instead he had immediately said, "Who told you not to bring some of your Devil Sect's helper?" Ren Woxing had laughed coldly and left.

Thus, the victory or defeat of that previous fight to the death was not decided. But they both had known in their hearts that each of their martial arts had a big flaw. They had been lucky not to lose to each other and to be able to train hard after the fight to correct the flaws. Especially Ren

Woxing as he had known that the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' had a secret danger attached to the skill, just like gangrene to the bone. He had used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' to absorb many opponents' inner energies where the opponents were from different schools and they all had different inner energies. Because he did not have the method to harmonise them into one in the past, the various energies had frequently come out unexpectedly. His own internal energy had already been very powerful so when he had felt these different inner energies surging and swirling, he had immediately suppress them before they became dangerous. In his first confrontation with an extremely powerful master, he had used up a great amount of his internal energy, and as a result, his own internal energy, which had long suppressed the others, had been weakened. When fronted with a powerful enemy, he not only had to contend with their attacks but also worry about his own internal problem. That had been an extremely difficult dilemma for Ren Woxing.

Later on, he had thought deeply to search for a method to make uniform all these internal energies. When concentrating fully on this, even the most intelligent hero would not be aware of the rebellion happening under him. In the end, he was imprisoned by Dongfang Bubai. While he was imprisoned under the West Lake for ten years, his mind was focused on fixing the "Art of Essence Absorbing" until he finally comprehended the right method to suppress all the various internal energies from different schools that there would no longer be the danger of the "Art of Essence Absorbing" reversing.

At the current fight, when Ren Woxing had not won after a while, he used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' when their two palms clashed. But unexpectedly, he found that Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was completely empty and he did not know where it went to. Ren Woxing was greatly startled that he couldn't absorb his opponent's inner energy. It was incredibly strange. Just before then he was also not able to

absorb Fangzheng's inner energy, but it was because in a blink of an eye Fangzheng was able to hide his internal energy without a trace and made his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' powerless. Not only had he not experienced this before, even in his dream, he would never have thought that this kind of strange matter could happen.

He used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' a few more times, but he could not feel where Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was. When he saw the fierce stab by Zuo Lengchan, he immediately retreated three steps and changed his moves. He then used a chopping move whose power was unrivaled. Zuo Lengchan changed into defence. The two people had fought for twenty to thirty more moves when Ren Woxing left hand chopped down while Zuo Lengchan's right hand stabbed towards Ren Woxing's left rib. Ren Woxing saw that the power of this poke was very fierce. He thought, "This poke really has no inner power?" In fact, he had deliberately revealed that empty spot allowing Zuo Lengchan to poke it. At the same time, he diffused his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' from his chest. He thought, "You have a deep inner energy but you're not letting my Art of Essence Absorbing absorb it. But this poke you used to attack me, if it has no inner energy, then it would be just like an itch to me. But if it was laced with any internal energy, then I'd absorb it."

As this thought flashed in his mind, Zuo Lengchan's finger poked his Tianchi acupoint. The spectators all cried out in surprise.

Zuo Lengchan's finger only stayed on Ren Woxing's chest for a short time. Ren Woxing immediately transferred his whole power. Sure enough, his opponent's internal energy was like a river dam broken open as it rushed into his Tianchi acupoint. He felt really happy and intensified his effort to absorb his opponent's internal energy faster. Suddenly, his body faltered. He slowly stepped back one step at a time. He did not say anything and was staring at Zuo Lengchan. His

body trembled and he was now motionless just like when people had their acupoints sealed.

Yingying frightenedly called out, "Dad!" and rushed to support him. She felt his hand was ice cold. She turned her head around and called out, "Uncle Xiang!" Xiang Wentian rushed in front of Ren Woxing and pushed his chest a few times. "Hey!" Ren Woxing reacted. He was looking angry and his complexion was pale. "Very good, I've never experienced this kind of game before. Let's compete again." Zuo Lengchan just shook his head.

Yue Buqun said, "The winner and loser have been determined, what's there to compete again? Didn't Headmaster Zuo seal Mr. Ren's Tianchi acupoint?"

Ren Woxing shouted, "Pei! Good, I was swindled so we'll just count this fight as my loss."

Zuo Lengchan's earlier technique was most hazardous. He had accumulated 'Polar Ice Energy' for over a decade and transferred all that energy into his index finger at that moment. He risked the danger of losing a lot of his internal strength and allowed Ren Woxing to absorb his internal power. Not only did he allow him to absorb it, he even forced it towards Ren Woxing by pouring it through his acupoint. Zuo Lengchan's polar ice energy was similar to the Boreal Finger of Plum Manor's Mr. Black-White; both were extreme yin and cold martial arts. However, Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was a lot deeper. In a few moments, Ren Woxing was frozen solid. Zuo Lengchan took advantage of this moment when the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' stopped by transferring his internal energy and sealing Ren Woxing's acupoint<sup>33</sup>.

Usually you would only see acupoints sealed in a fight between second or third class fighters in Wulin. When masters fought, they would never use such an ordinary martial art. But Zuo Lengchan was willing to part with a large amount of his internal energy and used a second or third class martial art method to win. Even though this method was dishonest, without an extremely good internal energy, it

would be very difficult to accomplish. Xiang Wentian knew that even though Zuo Lengchan had won, his internal energy had been exhausted and it would probably take several months for him to recover. He immediately said, "Just then Headmaster Zuo said that you would fight me after you had flattened Chief Ren. Please begin now."

Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and the rest of the people understood what he meant. After Zuo Lengchan had poked Ren Woxing, his face was wretchedly pale and he had not dared to say a single word. It was obvious that he had used up a lot of his internal energy. If the two of them fought, not only would Zuo Lengchan lose, after many moves he would be killed by Xiang Wentian. But Zuo Lengchan really did say those words before when Xiang Wentian challenged him. Would he actually eat his own words now? Everyone was hesitating on what to do when Yue Buqun said, "We already said before that for these three fights, each side will choose for themselves on who will go out to fight and not the other side. Didn't Chief Ren agree to this? Chief Ren is a big hero, a grand hero, how can we not regard what he said?"

Xiang Wentian coldly laughed and said, "Mr. Yue's dispute is really good and caused other people to admire you. But this word 'gentleman', there's something that doesn't fit. This kind of talking aimlessly resembled something a small person would do."

Yue Buqun replied indifferently, "From the point of view of a gentleman, everyone in this world is a gentleman. From the point of view of a small person, there's no small person in this world."

Zuo Lengchan slowly dragged his feet back a few steps till his back was on the pillar. He was having difficulty just to stand up let alone having to fight. Priest Chongxu moved a couple of steps forward and said, "I've heard that Left Protector Xiang is called 'Old Heavenly King' and your abilities are earth-shaking. Poor Taoist is ashamed to be the headmaster of Wudang. In this fight between the orthodox

schools and your respectable sect, I haven't done anything. I feel really ashamed. It'll be lucky today if I can fight with 'Old Heavenly King'. It would be a real glorious favour."

He was the leader of a martial art school but he was talking to Xiang Wentian in this way. Isn't that giving the opponent too much credit? It was hard for Xiang Wentian to refuse this so he said, "I have to respectfully obey your order. I respect Priest Chongxu's unrivalled 'Taiji Sword Art'. I will risk my life to accompany you and reveal my shortcomings." Xiang Wentian cupped his fist and retreated a couple of steps. Priest Chongxu also cupped his fist returning the propriety.

The two of them stood opposite each other. They were looking at each other for a while without drawing their swords. Suddenly, Ren Woxing shouted, "Wait! Brother Xiang, step back," and drew the sword on his waist. Everyone there was astonished: "He already fought two masters and his internal energy has been greatly harmed. Now he wants to fight a third time against Priest Chongxu?"

Zuo Lengchan was surprised, he thought, "My ten years of hard work on this Polar Ice Energy was poured into his Tianchi acupoint. Even if it were someone with a martial art ten times better than him would need around six to eight hours to recover. How can he fight another person after just a short while?"

How could anyone know that Ren Woxing was actually feeling like there were dozens of knives slashing and stabbing in his Dantian region. He was using all of his power just to talk calmly and steadily while not revealing the pain he was under.

Priest Chongxu smiled. "Chief Ren wants to grant some lesson? We've already said before that both sides will decide for themselves who will go out to fight. If Chief Ren wants to grant some lesson, we won't disobey what we've agreed upon. It's just that poor Taoist's advantage is too large."



"I've already staked my life in fighting two masters before. If I want to fight against Priest again, then I would be looking down at your Wudang School's sword art's hundred of years of reputation. Even though I'm mad, I wouldn't do this."

Priest Chongxu felt happy to hear this and nodded his head. "Many thanks."

When he first saw Ren Woxing drew his sword out, he hesitated. If he prevailed against Ren Woxing after they had fought him in succession, it would be said that it was not honourable. However, if he lost, then Wudang School would have no face to stand in Jianghu anymore. When he heard that Ren Woxing was not going to fight, he was relieved.

Ren Woxing continued, "Priest Chongxu is a new force in your respectable side. So we'll also get a new force for our side." He then looked up and shouted, "Little brother Linghu Chong, please come down!"

Everyone was greatly surprised and followed Ren Woxing's eyes in looking up towards the wooden signage. Linghu Chong was even more confounded. He was now in a very difficult position and did not know what to do for a short moment. But seeing that he could not hide anymore, he leapt down. He then knelt down in front of Great Master Fangzheng and kowtowed a few times to pay his respect. "I rushed into your treasured temple without permission. This is a really big sin. I'm ready to receive Abbot's punishment."

Fangzheng laughed before answering, "So it's young hero Linghu. I heard young hero's even breathing and sensed that your internal energy is profound. I felt it was really strange. I didn't know which master was visiting my humble temple. Please rise, please rise, this is too big a propriety, I don't deserve it." As he was speaking, he was joining his two palms together returning the propriety.

Linghu Chong thought, "So he already knew for some time that I was hiding behind that wooden signage."

Beggar Clan's leader Xie Feng suddenly said, "Linghu Chong, come and take a look at these words."

Linghu Chong stood up and followed his finger to look at three sentences behind a wooden pillar. The first sentence was: "Someone's behind the signage." The second sentence was: "I'll grab him down." The third sentence was: "Wait, this person's internal energy is orthodox and demonical. Don't know yet whether he's friend or foe." Every word was carved deeply and was clearly seen on the wooden pillar. They were written by Great Master Fangzheng and Xie Feng by using their fingers. Linghu Chong was alarmed and impressed. He thought, "Great Master Fangzheng detected my very weak breathing and was able to distinguish the origin of my martial art. He's really a divine person." He then immediately gave his respect to everyone around. "When seniors came to the hall, because I was afraid, I didn't dare to come down and pay my respect. Please forgive me." He believed that his master's face must be looking furious at the moment so he did not dare to look at his eyes.

Xie Feng laughed. "You were afraid like a thief? What are you trying to steal from Shaolin temple?"

"I heard that young lady Ren was detained at Shaolin temple. So I bravely came here to get her out," Linghu Chong replied.

Xie Feng laughed. "So you came here to steal your wife, haha, this is not afraid like a thief but it's called extremely daring in lewdness."

Linghu Chong replied with a straight face, "Young lady Ren treated me very kindly. Even if my body is grounded to dust and my bones are chopped into pieces, I'm still willing."

Xie Feng let out a long sigh. "What a pity, what a pity. A very promising youth's future is harmed because of a woman. If you don't abandon your evil way, then this honourable position of Huashan School's leader, do you think it would still be able to come to your hand?"

Ren Woxing said loudly, "What's so rare about being a leader of Huashan? When I die, the position of Chief in Divine Sun Moon Sect, wouldn't that be in my lucky son-in-law's hand?"

Linghu Chong was startled and tremblingly said, "Can... can.. cannot..."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Alright. No need for this idle talk anymore. Chong'er, why don't you get some lesson from this headmaster of Wudang's divine sword? Priest Chongxu's sword art is using soft to overcome hard and has this circling motion. It's very rare in the world so you must be really careful."

He called him 'Chong'er'. This was really regarding him as his son-in-law already. Linghu Chong silently examined the situation. Both sides had now won one fight each so this third fight would determine whether Yingying would be able to go down the mountain. He had already fought Priest Chongxu before and knew that he could win against him. In order to save Yingying, he must enter the fight. He turned his body around and knelt in front of Priest Chongxu to pay his respect.

Priest Chongxu hastily extended his hand to ask him to get up. He then oddly asked, "Why such a big propriety?"

Linghu Chong answered, "I really respect Priest. But under these circumstances, I'm forced to ask Priest to grant me a lesson. My heart feels uneasy about this."

Priest Chongxu laughed loudly and said, "Little brother's propriety is too excessive."

Linghu Chong stood up and Ren Woxing passed over the long sword to him. Linghu Chong took the sword in his hand. Then with the sword pointing down, he leaned his body forward. Priest Chongxu lifted his eyes to look at the sky outside the hall and was lost in thought thinking about Linghu Chong's sword art. Everyone there saw him not moving as if he was meditating and they all felt that this was really strange. After a long time, Priest Chongxu let out a

long sigh. "We don't need to fight this battle. The four of you can go down the mountain."

When these words were spoken, everyone was astonished. Exulted, Linghu Chong bowed towards Priest Chongxu. Xie Feng said, "Priest, what do you mean by those words?"

Priest Chongxu replied, "I can't think of a way to break his sword art. This battle, poor priest admits my defeat."

Xie Feng said, "The two of you haven't fought yet."

Chongxu told everyone, "Many days ago, at the foot of Mount Wudang, I've already fought him for more than three hundred moves and I lost. If we fight today, I would still lose."

Fangzheng and the rest of them asked, "Did this really happen?"

"Little brother Linghu's sword art was passed down by Feng Qingyang, Senior Feng. I'm not his match," Chongxu said. After he said this, he smiled slightly and stepped back.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, "Priest is very open-minded, this is really admirable. At first, old man here only admires you by one half. Now, I admire you seven-tenths." He said seven-tenths, but it was after all still not full. He then folded his hands in salute towards Great Master Fangzheng and said, "Great Master Fangzheng, we'll meet again some other time." Linghu Chong walked up in front of his Master and Master-Wife and kowtowed to them. Yue Buqun leaned his body to avoid it and coldly said, "You flatter me!" Madam Yue's heart was sore and tears filled her eyes. Linghu Chong went to Mr. Mo Da to pay his respect. He knew that Mr. Mo Da would not want other people to know about their contact in the past so he only kowtowed three times and did not say anything.

One of Ren Woxing's hands was leading Yingying and his other hand was leading Linghu Chong. He laughed, "Let's go!" He strode purposefully towards the door of the hall. Xie Feng, Zhenshan Zi, Yu Canghai, Priest Tianmen, and the other people were not as good as Priest Chongxu in terms of

martial art. Since Chongxu already admitted that he was not a match for Linghu Chong's sword art, even though they did not believe him, they also did not dare to rashly go up to fight and brought shame to themselves.

Just as Ren Woxing was about to step outside of the hall, they suddenly heard Yue Buqun shouted, "Wait!"

Ren Woxing turned his head around and asked, "What?"

"Priest Chongxu is an educated man. He doesn't want to fight someone with a narrow mind. We haven't fought out this third fight yet. Linghu Chong, I'll accompany you for this fight."

Linghu Chong was surprised and his whole body started to shake. His mouth was chattering as he said, "Master, I... I... how can..."

But Yue Buqun was calm when he replied, "Other people said that you've taken some pointers from martial uncle Feng and received the essence of swordsmanship from Huashan School. It seems that even I'm not your match. Even though you've already been expelled from Huashan, but in Jianghu, you're still setting up your reputation using our school's sword art. Because I am unable to teach you, all the seniors of the orthodox schools are exasperated by you, unworthy youth. If I don't take care of this then do I let other people take responsibility for this? Today, if I don't kill you, then you'll kill me." As he said these last few words, his voice became fierce. He then drew his sword out and shouted, "The two of us no longer have a master disciple relationship, en guard!" Linghu Chong took a step back and said, "Disciple doesn't dare!"

Yue Buqun thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong's chest. Linghu Chong leaned to the side avoiding it. Yue Buqun followed this with another two thrusts which Linghu Chong also avoided. Linghu Chong's long sword was still pointing at the ground and he had not used it to block the thrusts. Yue Buqun said, "You already gave me three moves.

Consider that as finishing the respect we have. Ready your sword!"

Ren Woxing said, "Chong'er, you're still not returning any move, do you really want to die here?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Yes", and immediately lifted his sword up. In this fight, should he let Master win or should he win over Master? If he deliberately held back and lost, even if he received heavy injuries, he wouldn't care, but Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying would all be detained on Mount Shaoshi for ten years. Great Master Fangzheng was surely a righteous eminent monk, but there was no guarantee that Zuo Lengchan and the rest of the Shaolin monks would not harm the three of them. In this ten year of imprisonment, it would be very hard to say whether they would be able to keep their lives. But he also thought about how he had been by himself since he was young, and it was Master and Master-Wife who brought him up. He considered them as his own parents and he had not repaid them for their kindness yet. How could he defeat Master in front of all the world's heroes and make him lose face and reputation?

As he was hesitating on what to do, Yue Buqun had already attacked him with more than twenty moves. Linghu Chong only used the Huashan sword moves previously taught by his master to block. He didn't dare to use the 'Dugu Nine Swords' as each of its moves was an attacking method meant to harm the opponent. After he studied 'Dugu Nine Swords', his knowledge had greatly advanced and furthermore, his internal energy was abundant. Although he was only using a common Huashan sword art, his sword's power and class naturally differed by a lot compared to the past. Yue Buqun was attacking continuously but he had not managed to harm him yet.

The spectators saw how Linghu Chong was wielding his sword and they naturally understood that he was intentionally giving way. When Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian looked at this, both their faces showed their worries.

Both of them remembered that day at the Plum Manor on Hangzhou's Mount Gu when Ren Woxing invited Linghu Chong to join the Divine Sun Moon Sect. He was giving him the Right Protector position and later on, the position of Chief. Ren Woxing would also impart to him the secret of how to harmonise the various internal energies in his body after using the 'Art of Essence Absorbing'. But this youth was hardly moved by this offer and was very loyal to his school.

At this time, seeing how he was so respectful towards his former master and master-wife, it seemed that if Yue Buqun were to stab him to death, Linghu Chong would even be willing to accept this in his heart. He was actually only using defensive moves so how would he be able to win? It was apparent that Linghu Chong had already decided not to win over his master, especially since they were fighting in front of so many accomplished heroes. He would have abandoned his sword and admitted defeat a long time ago if it was not for the fact that Yingying, Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian would be imprisoned on Mount Shaoshi if he lost. The two people, Ren and Xiang, were pacing back and forth not knowing what to do. They looked at the fight again and they thought, "What should we do?"

Ren Woxing turned his head around towards Yingying and whispered, "Go in front."

Yingying understood her dad's intention well. He was afraid that Linghu Chong would take into consideration the kindness of his former master and would intentionally lose the fight. He wanted her to go in front so that Linghu Chong would be able to see her and be reminded how she had treated him, so he would use his power and gain victory. She lightly groaned but did not move. After some time, when Ren Woxing saw Linghu Chong kept retreating, he became even more worried and again told Yingying, "Go in front." Yingying still did not move and groaned again not answering him. She thought in her heart, "You already understand how I treated you. If you think I'm more important then you'd help me go

down the mountain and you'd be able to gain victory by yourself. If you think your master is more important, even if I pulled your sleeve and cry, it would still be useless. Why must I stand in front of you to remind you of this?" She deeply felt that it was natural for two people to love each other. If she had to give some signs before Linghu Chong would consider her love for him then that was just too tasteless.

Linghu Chong was not restricted to using Huashan sword art when blocking each of his master's attack. If he had actually counter attacked, Yue Buqun would have been forced to throw away his sword and admit defeat a long time ago. He had seen a lot of flaws in his master's sword moves but he had not even attacked once. Yue Buqun understood Linghu Chong's heart from the beginning, so he attacked continuously using his Divine Violet Twilight Art in conjunction with his Huashan sword art. He already knew that Linghu Chong would not attack back so he kept advancing with all of his attacks and did not care about the flaws in his sword art anymore. As he did this, the power of his sword art had now greatly multiplied. The spectators saw that Yue Buqun's sword art was wonderful and he had also received an advantage, but he had not been able to stab Linghu Chong from the beginning. They also saw that when Linghu Chong wielded his sword, sometimes there was a move and sometimes there was no move. When there was no move, it looked like as if his long sword was just blocking in a disorderly fashion but looked marvellous at the same time. He only had to touch Yue Buqun's sword lightly to protect himself. The more they watched, the more they admired him. They all thought, "Priest Chongxu said that his sword art is inferior, seems like he didn't just make that up."

Yue Buqun had been fighting for a long time without stopping and he was becoming impatient. Suddenly, he thought, "Ayo, this is not good! This little traitor doesn't want other people to say that he doesn't know how to repay the



kindness of other people so he kept on fighting me. Even though he's not attacking, he's still making it difficult for me to gain victory. Everyone here is a master and is very observant. At this time, they must have observed a long time ago that this little traitor is purposely giving way to me. I've been continuously attacking him from the start, what would become of my dignity? How can this be considered as the behaviour of a school leader? This little traitor wants to give me some difficulties and force me to give way and voluntarily admit defeat."

He quickly transferred his Divine Violet Twilight Art into his sword. His sword hacked down splitting the air. Linghu Chong slanted his body and avoided the chop. Yue Buqun circled his sword and slashed towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong leapt above the sword. Yue Buqun flicked his sword upwards aiming towards the back of his body. The change in this sword move was extremely fast. There were no eyes at the back of Linghu Chong's body and the situation was very difficult for him to avoid. Everyone gasped in surprised. Linghu Chong was in mid air and there was nowhere for him to step on to launch his body forward. It was also too late for him to use his sword to block the strike. But then, they saw him using his sword to hit the wooden pillar in front him. Borrowing this force, he jumped to the back of the pillar and with a 'pu' sound, Yue Buqun's long sword penetrated the wooden pillar. The sword was pliable but with his internal energy injected to it, the long sword went through the pillar and the point of the sword stopped just inches away from Linghu Chong's body.

"Ah!" everyone gasped in surprise. The sound of this cry was full of happiness, delight and praise. Unexpectedly, everyone was happy for Linghu Chong. They admired him for the skilful and clever way he avoided the attack. They were also celebrating the fact that Yue Buqun did not manage to stab him. Yue Buqun had executed his unique skill, Three-Linking Strike, but was still unable to hit Linghu Chong.

Furthermore, he felt angry when he heard the spectators calling out in compassion towards his opponent.

This 'Life Snatching Three-Linking Immortal Sword' was a move from the Huashan School's sword branch, which he, a qi branch disciple, did not initially know. In those years, when the two branches were destroying each other, disciples of the sword branch used this sword art to kill many good fighters from the qi branch. At the same time, disciples from the qi branch were also slaughtering the disciples from the sword branch. After they had taken the leadership of the Huashan School, the good fighters from the qi branch attentively studied in detail these three advance sword moves 'Life Snatching Three-Linking Immortal Sword'. When they thought of the power of these Three-Linking moves on that day, there was still lingering fear in their hearts. During the study of this Three-Linking sword art, everyone said that this sword art belonged to the demonical path. But as they were seeking the exquisiteness of this sword art, they all forgot their own school's difficult 'Qi Drives the Sword' principle. They only said that the sword move was beautiful but in their hearts, they actually really admired it.

Seeing Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong fighting, Madam Yue was full of grief. When she saw her husband suddenly using these three moves, she thought in her heart, "In those years, the two branches wanted to destroy each other because of the dispute about the importance of qi cultivation and sword art. He's the head disciple of the qi branch but at this moment, he suddenly used the move from the sword branch. If an outsider saw through this, wouldn't they contemptibly mock us? Ai, he must have no choice but to use this move. But he's clearly not Chong'er's match, why is he still continuing to fight?"

She wanted to ask them to stop but this matter concerned a lot of people and not just her own school. She wanted to go forward but changed her mind, she grasped the handle of her sword and her heart was worried to death. Yue

Buqun lifted his right hand and pulled his sword out from the pillar. Linghu Chong did not move and stood still behind the pillar. Yue Buqun only saw how he stayed behind the wooden pillar looking like he was hiding from further attacks. He regarded that this happened because Linghu Chong was afraid of him and also because Linghu Chong respected his reputation. The two people studied each other. Linghu Chong said in a low voice, "Disciple isn't your match. We don't need to fight anymore." Yue Buqun uttered an 'hng'.

Ren Woxing said, "There can be no winner and loser in this fight between master and disciple. Great Master Abbot, there's no winner and loser for these three fights. Old man will pay for my sin, how about if we stop this?"

Madam Yue relaxed and inwardly sighed, "We clearly lost this fight. Chief Ren said this to give us face. In this case, it's best if we stop."

Fangzheng said, "Amitufo! What Shi Zhu Ren said saves everyone from injury and shows your wisdom. Old monk doesn't..." The word 'mind' had not been said when Zuo Lengchan interrupted, "Then we're going to let these four go down the mountain and let them harm Jianghu and massacre the innocents? Let their eight palms to be covered in the blood of hundreds and thousands of people and destroy everything good in this world? Should we still regard martial brother Yue as the headmaster of Huashan School?"

Fangzheng hesitated when a 'chi' sound was heard. Yue Buqun had gone around to the back of the pillar and thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong. Fast as lightning, Linghu Chong avoided the thrust. After many moves, the two of them were back in the middle of the hall. Yue Buqun wielded his sword and attacked quickly, advancing at every opportunity. Linghu Chong smothered these attacks by either blocking or avoiding. After more than twenty moves, Ren Woxing laughed. "To decide who wins this fight, we'll just have to wait for seven to eight days and see who dies from starvation first. I'm sure we'll find out by then." Everyone felt

that even though what he said was an exaggeration, it's likely that if they kept on fighting like this, it would be hard to get a result within a few hours.

Ren Woxing thought, "This old fellow Yue just thickened his face and kept on fighting. He's in an invincible position and couldn't possibly lose. But if Chong'er made a slight mistake then everything would be spoiled. The longer this fight goes, the more harmful it would be to us. I must say something to incite him." He then said, "Brother Xiang, we've really widened our view today in Shaolin temple."

Xiang Wentian replied, "Right. All of the top masters from Wulin are gathering here..."

"Among them, there's one who is better than the rest."

"Which one?"

"This person learned a divine martial art and other people will admire him when they see it."

"What divine martial art is this?"

"This person is learning Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art," Ren Woxing told him.

"Subordinate has heard about Golden Bell Cover, Metal Gown, but I've never heard of this Golden Face Cover, Iron Face."

"Other people's Golden Bell Cover, Metal Gown martial art makes one's body impervious to sabre. This person's Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art will make the face hard when practised."

"This Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art, which school or sect has this martial art?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"They said that this martial art is no small matter. It was created in the west mountain of Huashan by the headmaster of Huashan School, Jianghu's venerable Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun, Mr. Yue."

"I heard that Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun's internal energy art is unrivalled and his sword art is unmatched. As expected, it wasn't just an empty reputation. This Golden

Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art, after it's learned then your face will be impervious to sabres, is this right?"

"This move has a lot of usefulness. We're not disciples of the Huashan School so we wouldn't know the secret to this art."

"Mr. Yue already created this kind of divine martial art, then his name would be known throughout Jianghu and would forever be praised as an immortal."

"Of course. When we later meet with anyone from Huashan School, we must be really careful with their Iron Face Divine Art," Ren Woxing said.

"Yes, subordinate will remember this in my heart."

The two of them were talking back and forth like they were the actors in a comical drama, but there was a hint of ridicule in their tones towards Yue Buqun. Yu Canghai was giggling non-stop, taking pleasure in other's misfortune. Madam Yue's was blushing furiously. But it seemed that Yue Buqun didn't hear any of these conversations. He thrust his sword and Linghu Chong avoided it by slanting to the left. He quickly followed to the right and slashed his sword forward. Suddenly, he circled his sword back and the point of the sword thrust back out again. It was the Huashan School's sword move called 'Return of the Prodigal Son'. Linghu Chong lifted his sword to block it. Yue Buqun's sword was now dancing around in mid-air, executing the sword move called 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests'. Linghu Chong again blocked the attack.

Yue Buqun slashed twice with his sword. Linghu Chong was startled and hurriedly retreated two steps. His face was blushing as he called out, "Master!" Yue Buqun snorted and continued with his attack forcing Linghu Chong to take another step back. Everyone saw that Linghu Chong's face was blushing and he seemed to be in a desperate situation. They did not understand a single thing and all thought, "There's nothing strange about his master's three attacks, what's so great about it? How can it unexpectedly make

things difficult for Linghu Chong?" None of them knew that these three moves that Yue Buqun used were from the sword art that Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan created, the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. Linghu Chong suddenly felt sentimental, remembering the past when he was looking forward to the days when he would be able to share marital vows with his little martial sister, and when Yue Lingshan treated him nicely. With their childish thoughts, they had then felt that if the Yue couple could pass down martial arts, then the rest of the disciples would be able to as well. Thus, the two of them tried to create a set of sword art of their own and only the two of them were able to use this set of 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. That's why seeing this set of sword moves gave him a bittersweet taste in his heart.

He didn't expect Yue Buqun would unexpectedly use these three sword moves. Linghu Chong felt helpless, ashamed, and sad. He thought, "Little martial sister had already broken our ties of love. You're using this set of sword moves to make me recall my feelings and to put my mind in confusion. You want to kill me then just kill me." He felt that there was nothing for him to continue living on this world and death would be better.

Yue Buqun's long sword was thrust out again. The move he used was 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute'. Linghu Chong knew this move very well and he just unconsciously blocked it. Yue Buqun followed with a move called 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon'. These two moves complemented each other and the movements were graceful. Especially 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' with the long sword dancing in the air, looking like a divine dragon flying elegantly through the air.

According to a story, during the time of Chun Qiu, Qin Mukong had a daughter called Nong Yu who loved to play the flute. There was a youth called Xiao Shi, who arrived riding a dragon and could play the flute divinely. Later on, he taught Nong Yu how to play the flute. Qin Mukong then allowed him to take her to be his wife. 'Ideal Son-in-Law' was the literary

reference that these moves were taken from. Later on, the pair of husband and wife transcended to immortality together and occupied the middle peak of the Huashan Mountain. Huashan's Jade Maiden Peak had 'Phoenix Pavillion', the middle peak had Jade Maiden Temple, Jade Maiden Cave, Jade Maiden hair washing basin, and a dressing table, every one of them gained their fame from this fable. Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan had often gone to all these places but the meaning behind the story of Xiao Shi and Nong Yu, their happiness, and also what went on in the heart of those two people, they never knew any of those.

At the moment he saw Yue Buqun used the move 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon', Linghu Chong's heart became confused while his hand moved to block the attack. He thought, "Why does Master want to use this move? Does he want to remind me of my mistakes and kill me?"

After Yue Buqun used this move, he again used the move 'Return of the Prodigal Son' followed by 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests' which was followed by the three moves from the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. These moves were again followed by 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute' and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' moves. When masters competed, even when the moves went above a thousand, they would never duplicate the pattern. This pattern of moves had already been executed to fight the opponent before so using them again would be useless. When the enemy was familiar with your pattern then he could take advantage of it to make an attack. When Yue Buqun used this pattern for a second time, it caused all the spectators to be puzzled.

Linghu Chong saw Yue Buqun used the move 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' for the second time. This time, this move was followed by the three moves from the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. Suddenly, a thought flashed in his mind and he was enlightened. "So Master used these sword arts to remind me. I must abandon my evil ways and return to the righteous

way, and then the return of the prodigal son means that I would be accepted back into the Huashan School."

There were many ancient pine trees on Mount Huashan with branches full of leaves hanging down and stretching, as if they were welcoming guests who were coming up the mountain. They are called 'Welcoming Guests Pine Trees'. The move 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests' was formed to resemble the appearance of these ancient pines. He thought, "Master is saying that if I return to the family of Huashan School, not only would I be welcomed back, even the pine trees on the mountain would welcome me back." His heart trembled, "Master said that not only would I be welcomed back into the family of Huashan School, he would also give little martial sister as my wife. Master used the few moves from that 'Chong Ling Sword Art' to make me understand his intention clearly. It's just that I was muddled and didn't understand him so he used the two moves of 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute' and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' again." Returning to Huashan and marrying Yue Lingshan were two of his biggest desire. Suddenly, in front of all these masters, Yue Buqun promised him these two matters. Even though it wasn't conveyed outright by words, he understood it completely from these several sword moves. Linghu Chong knew that Master's most important vow was to never take back what he already said. He had already promised to take him back into the Huashan family and also betroth his daughter to him. So if he fulfilled his promises then these matters would definitely happen. In that instant, a feeling of happiness filled his chest.

He naturally knew of the deep love between Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi. He also knew that she did not love him any more but instead felt hatred towards him. But the marriage between man and woman was decided entirely by the parents and the daughter had no say in it. It had been that way for more than a thousand years. Yue Buqun had already betrothed his daughter to him, and Yue Lingshan



would not be able to reject it. Linghu Chong thought in his heart, "If I were to be able to re-enter the Huashan School, I would be thanking the heaven and earth already. But to also become partner with little martial sister; that would really be a joy from heaven. Little martial sister would surely be unhappy at the beginning but I would be suitable for her. After a long time, she would see that I'm sincere towards her and would slowly change her attitude."

He was beaming from ear to ear and was feeling very happy in his heart. Yue Buqun continuously used the moves 'Return of the Prodigal Son' followed by 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests'. His sword moves were becoming urgent looking like he was becoming impatient. Linghu Chong comprehended what Yue Buqun meant, "Master is telling me, the prodigal son, to return. Of course he couldn't say this out loud but he wants me to throw away my sword and admit defeat immediately. Then I would be able to rejoin the school immediately. I would be able to return to Huashan and get married to little martial sister. My life would be returned to me, what else do I want? But what about Yingying, Chief Ren, and brother Xiang? If I lose this fight then the three of them would be detained on top of Mount Shaoshi and they might be even be killed. I'm only coveting for my own happiness and not repaying other people's kindness. Can I still be called a person?" At this thought, the back of his body was covered with cold sweat and his vision became blurry. He saw Yue Buqun slashed his sword horizontally passing very close to his mouth then pointing the sword towards him, pushed forward. This was the move 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute'. Linghu Chong's heart was moved again. "Yingying was willing to die for me but I didn't even pay any attention to her plight. Is there anyone else in this world who is more vicious than Linghu Chong? No matter what, I have to repay Yingying's kindness." Suddenly, he felt dizzy, and heard a 'zheng' sound as a long sword fell on the ground.

All the spectators cried out in surprise.

Linghu Chong's body was swaying. When he opened his eyes, he saw Yue Buqun had leapt back and was looking furious. Yue Buqun's right wrist was bleeding. Linghu Chong checked the point of his sword and saw blood dripping from it. He was greatly startled. He knew that while his mind was in confusion, his hand was blocking the attack. But somehow, he unexpectedly used the 'Dugu Nine Sword' move to pierce Yue Buqun's right wrist. He immediately threw away his sword and knelt on the ground. "Master, disciple has sinned and deserves death."

Yue Buqun kicked out and hit him squarely on his chest. The kick was very fierce and swift causing Linghu Chong to fly off. While his body was in mid air, his vision became dark. He heard a 'peng' sound, and his body dropped on the ground. But he didn't feel any pain as he passed out.

# **Chapter 28: Accumulation of Snow**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**



**"I want to write some words on these four snowmen," said Yue Lingshan. She drew her sword and started writing on the snowmen with the sword tip.**

Without knowing how much time had passed, Linghu Chong gradually felt his body feeling colder. He slowly opened his eyes and saw a firelight which dazzled him. He quickly shut his eyes and heard Yingying happily called out, "You... you're awake!" Linghu Chong opened his eyes once again. He saw Yingying's pair of beautiful eyes staring at him with her face full of joy. Linghu Chong tried to sit up, but Yingying waved her hand. "Rest for a bit more."

Linghu Chong looked around, and saw that he was inside a mountain cave. Outside the cave, there was a big bonfire. He then remembered that he was kicked by his master. "What happened to my Master and Master-Wife?"

Yingying flatly answered him, "You're still calling him master? In this world, there's no such shameless master. You've already given way, but he didn't know what was good for him, and at the end, he was unable to get out of an awkward situation. He gave you a very fierce kick but broke his leg, serves him right!"

"My master broke his leg?" Linghu Chong asked, startled.

Yingying giggled. "Isn't it good enough that he wasn't shaken to death? Daddy said you still don't know how to use the Art of Essence Absorbing yet, otherwise you wouldn't have gotten injured."

Linghu Chong mumbled, "I stabbed master and also broke his leg. This is really... really..."

"You regret it?" Yingying asked.

Linghu Chong felt extremely ashamed. "I shouldn't have done that. If it weren't for Master and Master-Wife bringing me up, maybe I would've died a long time ago. How can there be a today? I repaid their kindness with enmity, I'm worse than an animal."

"He repeatedly wanted to kill you with his fierce moves but you just endured it and let him do it; that can be said

that you've repaid your master's kindness. Also, looking at the type of person you are, how could you have died? Even if the Yue couple didn't bring you up, you'd be called the little beggar in Jianghu because I don't think you would have died. Also, he already expelled you from Huashan, so the master disciple relation between you two was severed a long time ago. What is he to you now?" Yingying suddenly lowered her voice, "Brother Chong, you offended your master and master-wife because of me. My... my heart..." She lowered her head, and both of her cheeks were blushing.

Linghu Chong saw her revealing her little girl's shyness, while her beauty was enhanced by the raging fire outside the cave shining on her face. His heart was moved. Extending his hand, he held her left hand, and sighed, not knowing what to say. Yingying softly murmured, "Why did you sigh? You regret knowing me?"

"No, no! How can I regret it? Because of me, you were willing to give up your life in Shaolin temple. Even if later on my body were grounded to dust and my bones broken to pieces, I still wouldn't be able to repay for your kindness," Linghu Chong said.

Yingying stared into both of his eyes. "Why are you talking like that? Even until now, your heart is still regarding me as a stranger."

Linghu Chong felt ashamed. In his heart, there was always a feeling of estrangement towards her. "I said it wrong. From today onwards, I will wholeheartedly treat you well." As he said these words, he couldn't refrain from thinking, "How about little martial sister? Little martial sister? Could it be that I'll forget little martial sister?"

Yingying's eyes flashed with happiness. "Brother Chong, are you speaking the truth, or are you deceiving me?"

Suddenly Linghu Chong was no longer thinking of himself or of his longing for Yue Lingshan. He sincerely answered, "If I'm deceiving you, then let me be split in two by thunder, and not die a good death."

Yingying's left hand slowly turned over and gripped Linghu Chong's hand, which was already holding her hand. She felt that this moment was the most precious moment in her whole life. She felt her whole body becoming hot, and her heart felt as if it were floating on clouds. She wished that this moment would last forever. After a long time, she slowly said, "We're people who live in Wulin, I'm afraid we're destined not to die a good death. If later on you become ungrateful towards me, I won't hope that you'll be split in two by thunder. I... I... I'd rather kill you nicely with a single stab of my sword."

Linghu Chong was startled. He never expected her to suddenly say such words. When he recovered from his shock, he laughed. "My life was saved by you, so it already belongs to you. If you want to take it back, then you can come and take it back anytime."

Yingying smiled and said, "Other people said that you're a cunning and mannerless romantic. As expected, the words coming out of your mouth are suave and sly, and not decent and proper at all. I don't know what kind of fate that made me... made me like a frivolous romantic like you."

Linghu Chong laughed. "When was I being frivolous towards you? You said that I did, so now I want to be frivolous towards you." As he said this, he sat up.

Both of Yingying's feet twitched, and she shot out for a few feet. She lowered her head and said, "I regard you well and we've been adhering to customs and rules. If you think that I'm a lascivious girl, and that you can just take advantage of me as you please, then you're mistaken about me."

Linghu Chong replied in a serious manner, "How can I dare to regard you as a lascivious girl? You're an old granny of good moral standing and reputation, you didn't even allow me to turn my head around to look at you."

Yingying laughed and remembered the first time she met Linghu Chong. At that time, he kept calling her 'granny', and

was being very respectful towards her. She couldn't help smiling and her dimples showed. She then sat down around three to four feet away from Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong laughed and said, "You're not allowing me to be frivolous. From now on, I'll just keep calling you granny."

Yingying giggled. "Alright. Good grandson."

"Granny, my heart has..."

"You can't call me granny! Wait for sixty years before calling me that."

"If I could start calling you 'granny' from now till sixty years later, then my life wouldn't have been in vain."

Yingying felt touched and thought, "If I could really accompany him for sixty years, that would be as good as having ascended to heaven and becoming an immortal."

Linghu Chong gazed at her profile. Her nose was slightly pointed, her long eyelashes were hanging down, her appearance was delicate and tender, and her complexion was warm and soft. He thought, "Such a beautiful lady, why do those thousands of cruel and wild heroes from Jianghu respect and fear her, and they're also willing to go through fire and water for her?" He wanted to ask, but he felt that talking about this sort of things at this time would dampen their spirits, so he stopped himself from asking.

"Whatever you want to say, just say it," Yingying said.

"From the beginning, I felt there's something odd. How come Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and the rest of them fear you so much."

Yingying charmingly laughed. "I know that if you don't understand this matter well, then you will always feel uneasy. I'm afraid in your heart, you've always regarded me as a monster."

"No, no, I regard you as a vastly knowledgeable Immortal."

Yingying smiled. "You can't say three words without speaking nonsense. In fact your type of person, you might not necessarily be frivolous and mannerless, but you merely



love to talk sweetly. That's why other people said that you're a dissolute person."

"When I call you granny, do you think I was just talking sweetly?"

"Call me granny for the rest of your life then."

"I want to call you for the rest of my life, but it's not to call you granny."

Yingying's face turned bright red, and she felt sweetness swelled in her heart. She whispered, "I hope these words you just said aren't just sweet talk."

"You're afraid that I was just talking sweetly. For the rest of my life, when you cook meals for me, you don't have to put oil in them then."<sup>34</sup>

Yingying smiled and said, "I can't cook; I even burnt the frogs I was roasting."

Linghu Chong remembered those days when the two of them were roasting frogs in a wild field besides a creek. He felt at this very moment that the feeling of that time had returned. His heart was filled with tender affection.

Yingying said quietly, "If you're not afraid of my burnt meals, then I'll cook for you for the rest of your life."

"Why not? If you cook for me, then I'll eat three big bowls of burnt meals everyday."

Yingying softly said, "You love to joke around to your heart's content. Actually, you speak teasingly to make me happy, and I feel very happy hearing them." Their eyes met, and for a long time, they just looked at each other without speaking. After some time, Yingying slowly said, "You already know that my daddy was originally the chief of the Divine Sun Moon Sect. Later, uncle Dongfang... .. no, Dongfang Bubai. I keep calling him uncle, I'm too used to it. He used deceit and imprisoned daddy, and fooled everyone else. He said that daddy had died somewhere and had assigned him to be Chief when that happened. At that time, I was still small, while Dongfang Bubai was very cunning and his plan didn't have any flaw, so I also didn't have any suspicion."

After Dongfang Bubai managed to deceive everyone, he treated me unusually and was being very polite and gave me a lot of favour. No matter what I said, he never rejected it. That's why when I was in the sect, I was in a very honoured position."

"Those Jianghu's heroes, they're all subordinates of the Divine Sun Moon Sect?"

"They can't be regarded as members of the sect, but they've always been under my sect's subordination. Most of their leaders have taken my sect's 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill'."

Linghu Chong snorted. That day at Plum Manor on Mount Gu, when the elders of Devil Sect, such as Bao Dachu, Qin Weibang, and the others saw Ren Woxing's red pills of 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill', they were all frightened to death. When Linghu Chong remembered the event of that day, he couldn't help scowling. Yingying continued, "Once you've taken this 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill', every year after that, you have to take an antidote. Otherwise, the poison will come out and you'll die a miserable death. Dongfang Bubai treated those heroic warriors severely. If there were a small matter that's not up to his expectation, then he wouldn't give them the medicine. Every time, I have to seek his compassion to give them the medicines."

"You're their saviour then."

"I'm not a saviour. They came to me asking for help, and I didn't have the heart to just ignore them. This was originally also Dongfang Bubai's plan in deceiving the people in the sect. He wanted everyone to know that he's taking care of me and really respects me. Then, naturally, no one suspects him of actually usurping the position of Chief."

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, "This person is a shrewd schemer."

"But it's bothersome for me to always ask for compassion from Dongfang Bubai. Furthermore, the situation inside the sect is very different from the past. Everyone also sees how

Dongfang Bubai wants to be flattered, it's very disgusting. The spring of the year before last, I asked martial nephew Elder Bamboo Green to accompany me roaming the hills and playing with the water, and also to get out from the sect's matters and from saying those shameless words to Dongfang Bubai. Didn't think that I would meet you then." She then looked at Linghu Chong, and the memory of the first time she met him at the bamboo alley rose up. She lightly sighed and her heart was filled with tender feelings. After a long time, she went on, "Those thousands of heroes who came to Shaolin temple, of course not all of them had taken the medicines that I asked for. But it only needs one person to receive my favour, then his family members, good friends, sect members, brothers, and many others, they naturally have also received my favour. Also, when they went to Mount Shaoshi, it's not necessarily because of me. It's more likely that they were answering big hero Linghu's summon, and they didn't dare not to come." When she said this, she pursed her lips smiling.

Linghu Chong sighed. "You won't get any benefit from following me. But it's very likely that you'll advance a lot in the art of talking smoothly and sweetly." Yingying burst into laughter. In her whole life, everyone from the Divine Sun Moon Sect had always regarded her like a princess, and no one dared to disobey her. As she grew up, she became bossier, whatever she wanted was done, and no one dared to say any jokes to her. At this time, as she joked around with Linghu Chong, it was the happiest time in her life. After a time, Yingying turned her head around to face the wall. "I'm naturally happy that you led so many people to Shaolin temple to meet me. But those people are garrulous and crude, behind my back, they're saying I... saying I treated you well, but you're actually a romantic person, and leaves the seeds of love everywhere. And you don't really care about me at all..." As she said this, her voice gradually quietened down. She then quietly continued, "You're really

giving me a lot of face by making such a big disturbance, even if I... even if I died, I won't regret getting this good name."

"When you carried me on your back to Shaolin temple seeking for a cure, I was completely unaware. Later on, I was imprisoned under the West Lake, and when I got out, I encountered Heng-Shan School's matter. Then I worked hard after getting the information before finally meeting you, but you've suffered immensely there," Linghu Chong explained.

"I didn't suffer living at the mountain behind Shaolin temple. I lived alone in a stone house, and every ten days, an old monk came to give me firewood and rice. Apart from this, I didn't see anyone else until Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai came to Shaolin. Then Abbot wanted to see me, and I found out that he didn't pass on to you the Tendon Altering Sutra. When I found out that I was swindled, I was really angry and scolded that old monk. Dingxian Shi Tai told me not to worry, and she said that you are safe and well. She also said that you asked the two Shi Tai to go to the Shaolin Abbot to ask for his compassion," Yingying told him.

"When you heard her explanation, you stopped scolding Great Master Abbot?"

"When the Shaolin Temple's Abbot heard me scolding him, he only smiled and didn't get angry. He said: "Female shi zhu, old monk wanted young hero Linghu to join Shaolin on that day, and to take him as my disciple. After that, old monk would have taught him the internal art of Tendon Altering Sutra to repel the various internal energies in his body. But he resolutely refused, and old monk had no way to force him. Also, that day you carried him to come up... that day when he came up the mountain, he was on the verge of death. But when he went down the mountain, he was walking like a normal person. At the very least, Shaolin temple has given him some help." I thought what he said was reasonable so I said: "Then why do you detain me on the mountain?"

Buddhists don't tell lies, isn't what you're doing, deceiving me?" Yingying narrated.

"Yes, they shouldn't have concealed that from you."

"That old monk gave me another reason. He said detaining me on Mount Shaoshi was because he hoped that the Buddhist way would change my violent nature. What nonsense!" Yingying complained.

"Yes, what kind of violent nature do you have?"

"You don't need to say some nice words to make me happy. Of course, I have a violent nature. Not only have, but I have a considerable violence in me. But you don't have to worry, I won't use it on you," Yingying said.

"I hold you in a new light now, and thank you very much."

Yingying continued, "At that time, I said to the old monk: 'You're already old, but you're still bullying the young. How shameless.' That old monk replied: 'That day you voluntarily came to Shaolin temple willing to give up your life in exchange for young hero Linghu's life. Even though we didn't cure young hero Linghu, we also didn't take your life. Hearing from the two Shi Tai from Heng-Shan School, young hero Linghu had recently done many heroic deeds in Jianghu. Old monk is really happy for him. Taking into consideration the good reputation of the Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai, you can go down the mountain.' He also promised to release hundreds of my Jianghu friends being detained there. I've received a lot of his kindness, so I paid my respect to him a few times. After that, I followed Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai to go down the mountain. Later at the bottom of the mountain, I met someone called 'Ten Thousand Miles Loner' Tian Boguang. He said that you're already leading a few thousand people to come to Shaolin temple to meet me. The two Shi Tai said Shaolin temple was facing a difficulty so they couldn't just put their hands in their sleeves. So we parted ways then, and they wanted me to intercept you. Unexpectedly, the two kind and gentle seniors died in

Shaolin temple." After she said this, she let out a really long sigh.

Linghu Chong also sighed. "I don't know who did it. There were no traces of injury on their bodies and I also don't know how they lost their lives."

"What do you mean no traces of injury? Daddy, uncle Xiang and I went to have a look at the bodies of the two Shi Tai at the temple. I undid their gowns to have a look and saw on their chests two red holes the size of a needle. They were killed after being pierced by iron needles," Yingying told him.

Linghu Chong was startled and uttered an "ah". "Poison needle? Who uses poison needles in Wulin?"

Yingying shook her head. "Daddy and uncle Xiang's experiences are vast, but they also don't know. Daddy said that it wasn't poison needle. It's actually a pointed weapon aimed at a fatal point that killed them. But the needle piercing Dingxian Shi Tai was slightly slanted."

"Yes. When I saw Dingxian Shi Tai, she was still alive. This needle pierced into her chest, so it wasn't done secretly, and they were actually fighting face to face. The person who killed the two Shi Tai must've been masters with high martial art," Linghu Chong concluded.

Yingying added, "That's what my daddy also said. Since we have this clue, it won't be hard to find who the murderer is."

Linghu Chong slapped his hand on the cave's wall and said loudly, "Yingying, while the two of us still have our lives, we must avenge the two Shi Tai."

"Yes," Yingying replied.

Linghu Chong then put his hand on the wall to support himself in getting up. But he felt his four limbs feeling normal, and there was no soreness on his chest. It was as if he had not received any injury. "This is strange. My master gave me a kick, but it seems that I'm not injured."

"My daddy said that you've absorbed much inner energy from other people, and your internal energy is far above your

master. But because you didn't use your power to resist your master, you got injured. But your profound internal energy protected you, so your injury was light. Uncle Xiang gave you a few push to arouse your own internal energy to cure your injury, and you were alright in no time. But your master's leg unexpectedly broke. That was really strange, daddy thought for a long time, and he couldn't come up with an answer," Yingying explained.

"My internal energy is already powerful. So when master kicked me, the counter force from my internal energy broke his leg. Why's that strange?"

"It's not that. Daddy said that even though absorbing other people's energies would protect your body, but you must use it to injure other people. Compared to the completed internal art, you're still one level lower."

"So that's how it is," Linghu Chong said. He didn't really understand the reasons, so he didn't think much about it. But when he thought of how he injured his master in front of all those masters, he felt really guilty.

After a moment, both of them became quiet. They heard the crackling sound of the bonfire outside the cave, but they saw large snowflakes floating down. Compared to when they were still in the Shaolin temple, the snow had gotten even larger. Suddenly, Linghu Chong heard sounds of heavy breathing from the east outside the cave, and he immediately strained to listen to it. Yingying's internal energy wasn't as good as his so she didn't hear anything. She saw his expression and asked, "What did you hear?"

"I heard some sounds of panting just then; there's someone coming. But he's gasping heavily. That person's martial art is low so there should be nothing to worry about." He then asked, "Where's your dad?"

Yingying answered, "Daddy and uncle Xiang said they were going out for a stroll." As she said this, her face turned red. She knew that her father deliberately left to leave her alone with Linghu Chong so that when he woke up, they

could talk about their time apart. Linghu Chong again heard the sound of gasping. "Let's go out and take a look."

When the two of them went out of the cave, they saw the mark of Ren and Xiang's footsteps mostly covered up by the new snow. Linghu Chong pointed in the direction of the footsteps. "The gasping sounds are coming from that direction." The two of them started following the trail of footsteps. After more than a hundred feet, they came to a level area of the mountain. They saw Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian standing still next to each other in the middle of the snowfield. The two of them were startled, and rushed forward at the same time.

Yingying called out, "Dad!" She extended her hand and pulled Ren Woxing's left hand. Her whole body was shaken as she touched her father, and felt cold energy from her father's hand entering the marrow of her bones. She was frightened and called out, "Dad, you... what's..." She had not finished speaking when her body trembled and her teeth started chattering. But she immediately understood what was happening. After her father was hit by Zuo Lengchan's 'Polar Ice Energy', he had been using his power to suppress it. But at this time, he finally couldn't suppress it any longer and the cold energy had come out, and Xiang Wentian was exhausting his power in helping her father to resist it.

At Shaolin temple, Ren Woxing was deceived by Zuo Lengchan and had his acupoint sealed. After they had gone down the mountain, he briefly told her this. Linghu Chong had not yet understood what was going on, and from the light reflection on the snow, he saw the serious complexions of those two people, Ren and Xiang, and how Ren Woxing was gasping for air. He then realised that the gasping sound that he heard before was coming from Ren Woxing. When he saw Yingying's body trembling, he quickly extended his hand to grasp her left hand, and felt a wave of cold air entering his body. He immediately understood. Ren Woxing was hit by his enemy's Polar Ice Energy, and was now in the process of



distributing his internal energy according to the method written on the iron panel underneath the West Lake. He was slowly driving out the cold energy out of his body.

When Ren Woxing obtained Linghu Chong's help, he felt relieved. Xiang Wentian and Yingying's internal energies were different from his, and were only able to help him resist the cold energy and not to drive it out. He was already using all of his power just to stop his whole body from freezing, and had no more energy to drive the cold energy out. He had already resisted the cold energy for a long time and was feeling his power being drained as time went on. Linghu Chong's method was his last line of defence, which was slowly drawing the 'Polar Ice Energy' out of Ren Woxing's body and scattering it out. The four of them were holding hands standing in the middle of the snowfield, looking like statues. Big snowflakes kept falling on the four people's heads and faces, and gradually, their heads, eyes, noses, and gowns were being covered. Linghu Chong was using his energy and he inwardly thought there was something strange, "How come the snow's not melting on my face?" He didn't know that Zuo Lengchan had practised his 'Polar Ice Energy' to an extremely high level, so much so that the cold air coming out was as cold as the snow.

At this moment, their internal organs still held their warmth, but their skins were already ice cold causing the snowflakes falling on their bodies not to melt at all. Compared to the snow falling on the ground, it was accumulating faster on their bodies. After a long time, the sky slowly got brighter but the snow kept on falling down. Linghu Chong was worried that Yingying was weak and that she wouldn't be able to endure the invasion of the cold energy for long. But the poisonous cold air inside Ren Woxing's body had not been emptied yet. Even though he wasn't gasping anymore, he didn't know whether they could part hands at this time, and whether his condition would change if they parted hands. Unable to settle on an idea, he

continued helping him scatter the cold energy. He felt from holding Yingying's palm that even though her skin was cold, she had stopped quivering. He was also able to feel the tiny pulse on her palm. At this time, a few inches of white snow had accumulated on top of his two eyes, so he could only feel without seeing how the sky had become brighter. He continually increased his effort hoping that the cold energy in Ren Woxing's body would be completely driven out by morning.

After a long time, the sound of horse's hoof beats coming closer was suddenly heard from the northeast. They heard one horse was being ridden in front of the other horse. Then they heard a person shouting, "Martial sister, martial sister, please hear me out."

Even though both of Linghu Chong's ears were already covered by snow, he still heard him clearly. It was his master Yue Buqun's voice. Both horses were still galloping as they came nearer, and they heard Yue Buqun calling out again, "You don't understand the reason but you're throwing a tantrum already. Please hear me out." This was followed by Madam Yue shouting, "I'm not in a cheerful mood. What's that got to do with you? What's there to say?" Hearing the two people calling out to each other, they deduced that Madam Yue's horse was at the front, and Yue Buqun's horse was at the back chasing her. Linghu Chong felt it very strange. "Master-Wife is so furious. How did master offend her?" But he heard the horse Madam Yue was riding kept on going. Suddenly, she uttered a 'yi', and it was followed by the long neighing sound of the horse. It must be because she had suddenly reined in her horse to stop it, and both horses and person were now standing still.

A short time later, Yue Buqun caught up to her on his horse. "Martial sister, don't you think these four piles of snow look like snowmen?" Madam Yue uttered an 'hng', it seemed that her anger had not abated yet. She just said to herself,

"We're in the wilderness, how can there be people making these four snowmen?"

Linghu Chong thought, "How can there be snowmen in this wilderness?" He then realized, "The four of us are covered in white snow until we look swollen. That's why Master and Master-Wife thought that we're snowmen." Master and Master-Wife were right in front of him now, and the circumstance seemed awkward and yet actually very funny. He was afraid as he thought, "Once master found out that it's us, he's bound to give each of us a stab. If he wanted to kill us now, he wouldn't need to spend too much energy."

Yue Buqun said, "There's no foot marks on the snow. These four snowmen must've been made a few days ago. Martial sister, have a look, it seems like three of them are male and one is female."

"They all look similar, how can you tell they're male or female?" Madam Yue replied, and with a shout, urged her horse to go again.

"Martial sister, you're so quick-tempered! There's no one around here, let's talk about it. How can that be not good?" Yue Buqun urged.

"What quick-slow tempered? I'm going back to Huashan. You love to flatter Zuo Lengchan, you can go up Songshan by yourself."

"Who said I love to flatter Zuo Lengchan? I don't even want this position of Huashan School's leader, why do I want to be subservient to Songshan School?"

"That's right! I don't understand why you want to be subservient towards Zuo Lengchan and listen to all his instructions? Although he's the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Schools, he shouldn't be involved in the matters of our Huashan School. Once the five sword schools are joined into one, will there still be a Huashan School? When Master gave you the leadership of the Huashan School, what did he say?" Madam Yue retorted.

"The respected master wanted me to increase the reputation of Huashan School."

"That's right. If you agreed to Zuo Lengchan and joined Huashan School with Songshan School, how do you repay the late respected master? As the saying goes: would rather have chicken's beak, wouldn't want cow's buttock<sup>35</sup>. Even though Huashan School is small, we can support ourselves, and we don't need to depend on other people," Madam Yue said.

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh before saying, "Martial sister, Heng-Shan School's Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai's martial art, compared to the two of us, which one is higher and which one is lower?"

"We've never duelled before, I think we're about similar. Why are you asking this?"

Yue Buqun answered, "I also think that we're about similar. The two Shi Tai lost their lives in the Shaolin temple, it's obvious that it was Zuo Lengchan's doing."

Linghu Chong was surprised. He had also originally thought that it was Zuo Lengchan's doing, otherwise there was no one else with such good martial art. Although the martial art of the Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders were high, they were both such gentlemen and would have never harmed the two Shi tai. Songshan School had besieged the three nuns of Heng-Shan School many times. It seemed now that Zuo Lengchan had personally taken care of it. Ren Woxing had such good martial art, but he still lost under Zuo Lengchan's hand. So, Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai were naturally not his match.

Madam Yue said, "Killed by Zuo Lengchan? So what? If you have any evidence, then quickly invite all the heroes from the orthodox schools to confront Zuo Lengchan to avenge the two Shi Tai."

"One, I don't have any evidence. Two, we're weak that we can't fight him."

"What do you mean 'weak and can't fight him'? We'll ask Shaolin School's Abbot Fangzheng and Wudang School's

Priest Chongxu to preside over this justice. How would Zuo Lengchan dare to fight us?"

"I'm afraid before we can invite Abbot Fangzheng and the others, we'll both be like Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai," Yue Buqun reasoned.

"You're saying Zuo Lengchan would kill the two of us? Hng, we've already striven for so long in Wulin, is it really necessary to think that much? If we're afraid of the tiger in front and the wolf at the back, can we still be standing in Jianghu?"

Linghu Chong inwardly admired, "Even though Master-Wife is a woman, her heroic spirit is astounding."

Yue Buqun replied, "I won't regret the two of us dying, but what's the use of that? When Zuo Lengchan secretly moves against us, the two of us will die without knowing why or how. As a result, he would still be able to resume his plan and finish making the Five Mountains School. Maybe he would even fabricate some accusations to put on us." Madam Yue just hummed without answering him.

Yue Buqun continued, "Once we died, the disciples of the Huashan School would become easy pickings for Zuo Lengchan. How could they fight back? No matter what, we must always think of Shan'er."

Madam Yue held back her words. It seemed that her husband's words had finally moved her. After some time, she said, "En, we'll do what you say and won't uncover Zuo Lengchan's plot for now. We'll play along and be polite in front of him, and wait for an opportunity to move."

"You've agreed to my words, then it's very good. Pingzhi's family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' had already been stolen by that little thief Linghu Chong. If he agreed to give it back to Pingzhi, then my Huashan disciples could all learn from it. Then what else do we have to fear from Zuo Lengchan? My Huashan School is now in a precarious position, how can we survive?"

Madam Yue said, "Why are you still suspicious of Chong'er just because he had greatly advanced in his sword art? Are you still thinking that it's because he embezzled Pingzhi's family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'? During the battle at Shaolin temple, Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu both said that his wonderful sword art was passed down by martial uncle Feng. Even though martial uncle Feng is from the sword branch, he's still from our Huashan School. Of course it's wrong for Chong'er to join hands with the demons from the Devil Sect, but anyhow, we can't wrongly accuse him of embezzling the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. If you still don't believe Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu, then who would you believe in this world?"

Linghu Chong felt a swell of gratitude as he heard Master-Wife explaining things on his behalf. He really wanted to go out there to give her a hug. Suddenly, the top of his head was shaken a few times as someone patted him. He thought, "This isn't good, we've been discovered. Chief Ren's poisonous cold energy hasn't been completely driven out yet. If Master and Master-Wife were to duel with me again, how can that be good?" He felt the internal energy coming from Yingying's hand became more severe. He guessed that Ren Woxing was also feeling uneasy. Again, someone lightly tapped his head a few more times, but then there was no more movement. Then he heard Madam Yue saying, "Yesterday when you were fighting Chong'er, you used 'Return of the Prodigal Son', 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests', 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute', and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' successively. What's the meaning behind this?"

"Hey, hey, even though this little thief's conduct is improper, he was still brought up by the two of us. It's very pitiful to see him mistakenly going down the wrong path. I only wanted him, the prodigal son, to return and to let him know that I'll allow him to return to the Huashan family," Yue Buqun told her.

"I got the meaning of that, but how about the other two moves?"

"You already know about it, why do you still ask?"

"If Chong'er agreed to return to the right path, then you promised Shan'er to be his wife, didn't you?"

"Right."

"This hint of yours, was it just a momentary measure, or was it for real?" Madam Yue asked, but Yue Buqun didn't answer. Linghu Chong again felt someone lightly tapping the top of his head. He immediately realized that Yue Buqun was pondering and lightly tapping the snowman at the same time. It wasn't because the four of them had been discovered. He then heard Yue Buqun answering, "A gentleman's word is like a mountain. I would not renege on a promise I've already made to him."

"He's completely infatuated by that Devil Sect's witch, how could you not know that?" Madam Yue queried.

"No, he felt appreciative towards that witch, but he's not infatuated with her. He treats that witch very differently compared to the loving manner that he treats Shan'er. You didn't see that?"

"I naturally see it too. You're saying he still has feelings for Shan'er?"

"Not only still has feelings, he simply... simply still loves her deeply. Once he understood the meaning behind the sword moves that I used, didn't you see how he became deliriously happy and ecstatic?"

Madam Yue coldly said, "So, for this reason you used Shan'er as a bait to hook him? You were going to use Shan'er to make him lose to you?"

Even though Linghu Chong's ears were full of snow, he still heard the anger and ridicule in the words that his Master-Wife said. He had never heard his Master-Wife used this kind of tone before. The Yue Buqun couple had always regarded him as their son, and they had always spoken to him about everything without keeping any secret. Madam Yue was quick

tempered, and she occasionally argued with her husband when they were at home. But in front of the school's disciples, she always respected her husband's position as leader of the school and did not defy his orders. The way she spoke just then showed her heart's discontent.

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh. "So even you can't understand my intention. My own success and failure is a small matter, while the prosperity and decline of the Huashan School is a big matter. If I could persuade Linghu Chong to return to Huashan, then I would've solved four matters in one fell swoop. This would've been a fine deed."

"What four matters in one fell swoop?" Madam Yue asked.

"Linghu Chong's sword art is extremely high, and is far above me. It's alright if he got his sword art from the Evil Resisting Sword manual. It's also alright if he got it from martial uncle Feng. If he returned to Huashan, the prestige of my Huashan School would greatly rise and its reputation would spread throughout the realm. This is the first big matter. Zuo Lengchan's plot of annexing Huashan School would no doubt become hard to accomplish, and the three schools of Taishan, Heng-Shan, and Hengshan would also be safe. This is the second big matter. When he returns to the orthodox school, it will not only make the Devil Sect lose a powerful ally, they will instead have gained a big enemy. The orthodox would flourish while the demonical would become weak. This is the third big matter. Martial sister, don't you think this is right?" Yue Buqun spoke.

"En, what's the fourth matter?"

"The fourth matter, we don't have any son so we've always regarded Chong'er as our own. Seeing him mistakenly gone down the wrong path is actually very painful for me. I'm not young anymore, this reputation that I have in the world, why do I need to be concerned about it? I only want him to change his way and return to the orthodox path so as to allow our family to have a harmonious reunion. How can this be not a happy matter?" Yue Buqun answered. When Linghu



Chong heard this, he couldn't help his heart feeling excited, and he nearly called out, "Master! Master-Wife!"

"Shan'er and Pingzhi are perfectly suited to each other. Are you really willing to tear apart the two of them and make Shan'er begrudge you for the rest your life?"

"I'm doing this for Shan'er's own good."

"For Shan'er's own good? Pingzhi is diligent, earnest, and well-behaved, what's not good about that?"

"Even though Pingzhi is diligent, but compared to Linghu chong, he still lacks by a sky deep. Even if he gallops on a horse for his whole lifetime, he wouldn't be able to catch up to Linghu Chong."

"Strong martial art makes good husband? I'm really hoping that Chong'er would return to the orthodox path and return to our school. But he creates trouble as he pleases, is frivolous and is too fond of good wine. If Shan'er marries him, she is bound to get neglected for the rest of her life."

Linghu Chong felt ashamed in his heart. "Martial mother judges me to be 'creating trouble as I please, frivolous and fond of good wine'. But if little martial sister really become my wife, would I disappoint her? No, never!"

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh and then said, "In any case, I threw caution to the wind, but this little traitor has fallen very deeply. These words that we're talking about are all in vain. Martial sister, are you still angry at me?"

Madam Yue didn't answer him. But after a while, she asked, "Does your leg still hurt a lot?"

"It's only an external injury, it's not that serious. Let's go back to Huashan," Yue Buqun answered, and Madam Yue acknowledged him. They then heard the sound of two horses galloping farther and farther away from them.

Linghu Chong was utterly confused, and he repeatedly went over the conversation between his Master and Master-Wife in his head. So much so that he forgot to move his internal energy. Suddenly, a portion of the cold energy rushed up his arm and he was unable to restrain it. He felt

the cold strangely entering the bones in his whole body, and he hastily regulated his internal energy to resist it. At the moment he regulated his energy, he suddenly felt that it was blocked at his left shoulder, so he hastily increased his energy. But the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' that he had practised was only according to the secrets engraved on the iron panel, which he had learned by himself without any teacher. So there were still many kinds of refined and obscure techniques that he had not learned yet. By forcefully rushing his energy, his energy was dissipated even more. So what started as a gradual stiffness in his left arm was followed by the numbness on the left side of his body, left waist, and all the way down to his leg which was now feeling numb. Linghu Chong felt frightened, and opened his mouth to shout, but he found that even his lips couldn't move.

Right then, they heard the sounds of hoof beats from two horses coming closer. A person exclaimed, "There's a mess of hoof prints here. Dad and mum must've stopped here for a moment." It was really Yue Lingshan's voice. Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He thought, "How come little martial sister is also here?" Then he heard another voice saying, "Master's leg was injured, let's not go astray and quickly catch up to them." It was Lin Pingzhi's voice.

Linghu Chong thought, "Yes, the snow on the ground shows the hoof prints clearly. Little martial sister and martial brother Lin must've been chasing Master and Master-Wife, so they're on the same road and had finally come here."

Yue Lingshan suddenly called out, "Little Lin, look at those four snowmen, they look like fun. They're standing in a row and holding hands."

"There's no houses nearby, how come there's people here making snowmen?"

Yue Lingshan laughed. "Let's make two snowmen for ourselves, alright?"

"Alright, we'll make one man and one girl, and they'll be holding hands too," Lin Pingzhi acknowledged.

Yue Lingshan turned her body over and dismounted her horse. She cupped the snow on her hand and started to make her snowman.

"Let's find Master and Master-Wife first; it's more important. After we've found them, then we'll make our two snowmen," Lin Pingzhi told her.

"You always know how to make people lose interest. Even though daddy's leg is injured, he can still ride a horse just fine. Also mommy is besides him, what's there to be afraid of? When the two of them started to use their swords in Jianghu, you weren't even born yet."

"What you said isn't wrong. But because we haven't found Master and Master-Wife, we'll feel uneasy while playing here."

"Alright, I'll listen to you then. But after we've found dad and mom, you have to accompany me in making two very good looking snowmen."

"Of course," Lin Pingzhi answered.

Linghu Chong thought, "I thought for sure that he would've said: 'We'll make it as good looking as you.' or maybe: 'It'll be very hard to make it as good looking as you.' I never expected him to just say 'Of course' in finishing up the matter." He then thought more, "Martial brother Lin is honest and settled, how can he be frivolous like me? If little martial sister wanted me to make snowmen with her, even if there were a big matter, I would put it to the back of my mind. Little martial sister is very submissive towards him, even though she's not willing, she doesn't fight back or argue at all. How can she be like that when she's talking to me? En, martial brother Lin has recovered, but I don't know whose sword chopped him, and little martial sister has put the blame on my head." He was striving to listen to the conversation between Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi, and had again forgotten about the stiffness in his own body. But this actually fitted in with the secret of the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' which was: 'Don't concentrate, don't feel

anything'. The numbness in his left leg and left waist gradually lightened.

Then he heard Yue Lingshan saying, "Alright, since we can't make snowmen, I want to write some words on these four snowmen." With a 'shua' sound, she drew her long sword out.

Linghu Chong was again startled. "She wants to use her sword to slash and stab words on our bodies? This is going to be disastrous."

He wanted to call out or use his hand to stop her, but he was unable to say anything and he couldn't move his arms. But he heard a few light sounds of 'chi, chi' as she used the point of her sword to write a few words on the snow on Xiang Wentian's body. She wrote more words and finally reached Linghu Chong's body. Fortunately, she only drew her words shallowly and didn't go deep enough to see the clothes or to harm Linghu Chong's skin. Linghu Chong was thinking, "What is she writing on our bodies?"

He then heard Yue Lingshan softly saying, "Come and write a few words."

"Alright!" Lin Pingzhi answered. He took her sword and also wrote on their bodies from right to left. He stopped when he reached Linghu Chong's body. Linghu Chong thought, "And what did he write?"

He only heard Yue Lingshan said, "That's right, the two of us are going to be like that."

The two of them were quiet for a long time. Linghu Chong felt it even more strange, he thought, "What must they be like? After the two of them are gone and Chief Ren's poisonous cold energy is driven out, then I'll get out and take a look. Aiyo, that's not good. Once I move, then the snow on my body will fall and the words on my body will be gone. If the four of us move at the same time, then all the words will be gone."

After some time, he heard a group of horses galloping from somewhere far coming towards them. Linghu Chong

deduced from the horses' hoof beats that there were more than ten horses coming. He thought, "It's most likely they're the rest of the Huashan School's martial brothers and sisters."

The hoof beats were gradually getting nearer, but the two people, Lin and Yue, seemed to not care about it. He heard those people were coming from the northeast as they came nearer. When they were still a few li away, seven to eight people broke off and galloped to the west, while the rest of the people continued to come nearer. It was obvious that they were trying to outflank the two wings. Linghu Chong was worried. "The incoming people are harbouring evil intentions!"

Suddenly, Yue Lingshan called out, "Aiyo, there are people coming!" The sound of the horses galloping became faster as those people urged their horses. Two 'sou, sou' sounds were heard as they shot two long arrows. This was followed by the sound of two horses neighing sorrowfully and dropping heavily on the ground. Linghu Chong thought, "The martial arts of these people are not weak, and their intentions are evil and cruel. They shot little martial sister and martial brother Lin's horses first to prevent them from escaping."

He then heard the laughter and shouting from these people as they approached on their horses. Yue Lingshan was frightened and stepped back a few steps. Linghu Chong again heard a person laughed and said, "One little brother, one little sister, which family or school are you from?"

Lin Pingzhi answered in a clear voice, "I'm Lin Pingzhi from the Huashan School, this is my martial sister with the surname Yue. We're not acquainted with you, why did you kill our horses?"

That person laughed. "Huashan School? En, your master, was he the one defeated by his own disciple, and called Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue?"

Linghu Chong's heart was pained to hear this. "These groups of heroes were gathering at Shaolin, and I offended Master. It only happened yesterday, but in a short time, everyone around the world has already known about it. I troubled Master and made other people ridicule him. This is a very grave sin."

"Linghu Chong's conduct is improper, and time and again, he violated the rules and customs. The year before, he was expelled from the family of Huashan School," Lin Pingzhi said. The meaning behind his words was that even though Master had lost to Linghu Chong, he had lost to an outsider and not to a disciple of his own school.

That person laughed. "This lady's surname is Yue, what is she to Yue Buqun?"

Yue Lingshan indignantly said, "What's that got to do with you? You killed my horse, pay back for my horse!"

That person laughed again. "She looks unrestrained and vigorous, it's most likely that she's Yue Buqun's little mistress."

The remaining ten more people burst into laughter. Linghu Chong was inwardly startled, "These people are vulgar and coarse, seems that they're not people from the orthodox schools. I'm afraid that they'll harm little martial sister."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Sir, you're a senior in Jianghu. How can you speak such filth? My martial sister is my master's daughter."

That person laughed. "So it's Yue Buqun's young lady. Only your reputation sounds good."

Another person on the side asked, "Brother Lu, why does only her reputation sound good?"

That person answered, "I once heard people said that Yue Buqun's daughter is the most beautiful girl in the whole world. But that's not the case when I look at her now."

Another person laughed and said, "This little girl's appearance looks ordinary but she has a fair white skin. If we

stripped her, she might look alright. Haha, haha!"

Those people all laughed loudly hearing this. Their laughter was full of lewd meaning. When Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi, and Linghu Chong heard such rude talk, they were all furious. Lin Pingzhi pulled his long sword out and shouted, "You're spouting such shameless words, I pledge my life to deal with you."

That person laughed. "Have a look, what did these two lewd people write on the snowmen?"

Lin Pingzhi loudly called out, "I'll fight with you." Linghu Chong heard a 'chi' sound, and he knew that it was Lin Pingzhi stabbing with his sword. This was followed by the continuous clashing sound of weapons, as some people jumped down from their horses to fight him. Yue Lingshan immediately pulled her sword out. Seven to eight people called out at the same time, "I'll fight this little girl." One man laughed and said, "Everyone don't fight, everybody will get their turn." Weapons clashed and Yue Lingshan started to fight with the enemies. A person bellowed painfully as he was stabbed. A man said, "This little girl is very fierce. Old Three Shi, I'll avenge you."

As the sound of battle rumbled on, Yue Lingshan called out, "Be careful!" A loud 'tang' sound was heard and Lin Pingzhi uttered an 'hng'. Yue Lingshan was startled and called out, "Little Lin!" It seemed that Lin Pingzhi had been injured.

A person called out, "Let's butcher this little kid!"

The leader of that group answered, "Don't kill him, capture him alive. Once we've captured Yue Buqun's daughter and son-in-law, we don't have to be afraid that hypocrite not listening to us."

Linghu Chong was striving to listen but all he could hear was the sound of weapons splitting the air. Suddenly, a loud 'tang' sound was heard followed by a slapping sound. A man scolded, "Damn it, stinky lady." Linghu Chong suddenly felt someone leaning against his body, and he heard Yue

Lingshan gasping for air. It was really her leaning on his 'snowman' body. After numerous 'ting tang' sound, a man happily shouted, "This still can't capture you?"

"Ah!" Yue Lingshan was startled and the sound of battle stopped, while those people started laughing loudly.

Linghu Chong felt that Yue Lingshan was being dragged away by someone, and he heard her screaming, "Release me! Release me!"

A person laughed. "Old Two Min, you said that her whole body is white. I don't believe it, let's open up her gown and have a look." This was accompanied by the sounds of people clapping and cheering.

Lin Pingzhi scolded, "Dog..." A slapping sound was heard as someone kicked him. This was followed by the sound of clothes being ripped. When Linghu Chong heard little martial sister being insulted by those thieves, why would he care whether Ren Woxing's poisonous cold energy had been completely driven out or not? He used his power to jump out of the snow. His right hand pulled the long sword out of his waist, and his left hand moved to wipe the snow on his face. But who would've thought that his left hand didn't respond to his thought and didn't move at all.

Those people cried out in surprise. He extended his right hand to wipe the snow on his face, then as his vision cleared, he sent his long sword out and three men were pierced through their throats. He turned around and slashed twice killing two more people. He saw in front of him one man holding both of Yue Lingshan's arms behind her back, while one man was standing in front of her waiting for him. Linghu Chong stabbed his long sword at the lower left side of that person. Then he lifted his right leg kicking that person's corpse away to clear his long sword. He heard people attacking from behind him, and without turning his head, he reversed his sword and stabbed two people's hearts. He held his sword normally again and stabbed the throat of that person holding Yue Lingshan's arms. That person lost his hold



and dropped forward onto Yue Lingshan's shoulder with blood gushing out from his throat.

The situation had completely changed all of a sudden. Linghu Chong had killed nine people successively in just the blink of an eye. The leader of those people shouted and smashed down two iron plates on Linghu Chong's head. Linghu Chong's long sword trembled, went through the gap between the two iron plates and stabbed the leader's left eye. That person screamed in pain until he finally dropped down on the ground. Linghu Chong turned his head around and slashed his sword out killing three more people. The remaining four people cried out as they were frightened to death and quickly ran for their lives. Linghu Chong shouted, "You've insulted my little martial sister, none of you will get out of here alive!" He chased two people and stabbed both of them from their backs. Each stab penetrated through their chests. The two people had been running very quickly. Even though the sword had cut their breaths, their legs were still running forward. They still ran for more than ten steps before dropping on the ground.

Linghu Chong saw the remaining two people were also running away. One was running towards the east and one was running towards the west. He turned to the east and tossed his sword. The long sword flew like a silver of light and struck the back of that person's waist. Linghu Chong turned westward and gave chase to the last remaining person. After running for more than a hundred feet, he caught up to that person. He extended his hand and only then did he realize that there was no weapon in his hand. So he moved his power into his finger and poked the back of that person. That person felt pain at his back and turned around hacking his sabre down. Linghu Chong's bare hand martial art was just ordinary. Even though his poke managed to hit the enemy, he didn't know the method of moving his energy so he didn't injure his enemy. When he saw his opponent chopping his sabre down, he couldn't help feeling nervous and hastily

avoided it. At the same time, he saw a big weakness on the right side of that person, so he formed a fist with his left hand and punched out. But unexpectedly, his left arm only moved a little and he was unable to lift it further when his enemy's sabre was already chopping down. Astonished, Linghu Chong hastily jumped back. That person lifted his sabre and ferociously charged at Linghu Chong. Since Linghu Chong didn't have any weapon in his hand, he didn't dare to fight with the enemy, so he quickly turned around to escape.

Yue Lingshan picked up a long sword from the ground and called out, "Big martial brother, sword!" She then tossed the long sword towards him. Linghu Chong grabbed the sword with his right hand and turned around laughing loudly. That person still had his sabre lifted above his head waiting to chop it down when he suddenly saw Linghu Chong's sword flickered. In that moment, he was stupefied and unexpectedly didn't chop his sabre down.

Linghu Chong slowly walked toward him. That person's whole body was trembling with both his knees bent as he sat heavily on the snow. Linghu Chong indignantly said, "You insulted my martial sister so I can't spare you." He lifted his long sword onto his opponent's throat. But something flashed in his mind, so he walked a step closer, then in a whisper asked, "What was written on the snowmen?"

That person tremblingly answered, "It's... it's... 'Till the sea is dried... sea is dried... and the rocks are dust, our... love... love will never... will never change.'"

From the moment this phrase 'Till the sea is dried and the rocks are dust, our love will never change' existed in this world, this was probably the first time ever that it was being said in such a frightened and sad manner.

Linghu Chong was expressionless and said, "En, it's 'Till the sea is dried and the rocks are dust, our love will never change.'"

He felt sour in his heart, and sent his long sword out and pierced that person's throat. He turned around and saw Yue

Lingshan was supporting Lin Pingzhi to get up. Both of their faces and bodies were full of blood. Lin Pingzhi stood up and cupped his hands towards Linghu Chong. "Many thanks to brother Linghu for your kindness in helping us."

"What's that for? Your injuries aren't serious?" Linghu Chong asked.

"It's alright," Lin Pingzhi answered.

Linghu Chong returned the long sword to Yue Lingshan, then he pointed towards the hoof prints on the snow. "Master and Master-Wife went that way."

"Alright," Lin Pingzhi said.

Yue Lingshan led two of the enemy's horses and mounted one of them. She said, "We'll go find dad and mom." As Lin Pingzhi struggled to mount his horse, Yue Lingshan rode her horse to go besides Linghu Chong. She reined her horse in and looked at his face. Linghu Chong also looked back directly into her eyes.

"Many... many thanks to you..." Yue Lingshan stammered. Then she turned around, lifted her rein, and the two horses started to go towards the northwest following the hoof prints left by the Yue Buqun couple.

Linghu Chong was disquieted as he watched the back of those two people entering the distant forest. He then slowly turned around and saw Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying had already shaken out the snow on them and were now looking at him. Linghu Chong happily inquired, "Chief Ren, I didn't trouble you?"

Ren Woxing laughed bitterly. "I wasn't troubled, but you may be in trouble. How's your left arm?"

"Something's not right with the meridian on my arm, my qi can't go through it and I actually can't move it."

Ren Woxing scowled. "This is a little bit troublesome, we have to think of something to do about it. You rescued Yue family's young lady, that can be counted as repaying the kindness of your master. From now on, nobody owes anyone

anything. Brother Xiang, how come that old Lu didn't progress? Why is he doing this kind of despicable thing?"

Xiang Wentian answered, "Hearing from his tone, it seemed that he wanted to capture these two young people and take them to the Dark Wood Cliff."

"Could it be that this is Dongfang Bubai's idea? What connection does he have with this hypocrite?" Ren Woxing pondered.

Linghu Chong pointed at the corpses on the snow and asked, "These people are Dongfang Bubai's subordinates?"

"They're my subordinates," Ren Woxing answered and Linghu Chong nodded his head.

"Daddy, how about his arm?" Yingying worriedly said.

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "Don't worry! My good son-in-law helped daddy repel that cold energy, so father-in-law will think of a way to cure his arm." After he said this, he laughed loudly and stared at Linghu Chong studying him. He saw Linghu Chong standing there looking very embarrassed. Yingying said quietly, "Daddy, take a rest on speaking these kinds of words. Brother Chong has been friends with Huashan's Miss Yue since childhood and they've grown up together. The look that Brother Chong was giving young lady Yue, how could it be that you still don't understand?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "What kind of person is that hypocrite Yue Buqun? How can his daughter be compared to my daughter? Also, this girl Yue already has someone else in her heart. From now on, Chong'er will never think of this fickle girl anymore. The matter that happened when you're kids, how can that be allowed?"

"Brother Chong made such a big disturbance at the Shaolin temple because of me and the whole world heard about this. Also, because of me, he wasn't willing to go back to Huashan. My heart's already very satisfied over these two matters. There's no need to raise any other talk," Yingying said.

Ren Woxing was well aware that his daughter liked to win. Since Linghu Chong had not proposed the issue of marriage yet, it was inappropriate to talk about it too much. However, sooner or later, they had to talk about this matter. He again laughed loudly. "Very good, very good, we must talk slowly about important lifelong matters. Chong'er, let me tell you the trick to make your arm's meridian passable." He then stood besides Linghu Chong and told him how to move his qi and how to make his meridian passable. He then waited for Linghu Chong to repeat back to him the method to make sure that he remembered. He then said, "You helped me repelled that poisonous cold energy and I taught you how to make your meridian smooth, so we don't owe each other anything. You must wait for seven days before the meridian on your left arm is recovered, you mustn't be impatient."

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered.

Ren Woxing waved his hand calling for Xiang Wentian and Yingying to come over. "Chong'er, that day in Plum Manor on Mount Gu, I invited you to join my Divine Sun Moon Sect. At that time, you refused. Today, the situation is very different and I'm bringing up that old matter again. This time, you couldn't possibly refuse with your excuses again?" Linghu Chong hesitated and didn't answer.

Ren Woxing said again, "You already studied my Art of Essence Absorbing, later on, you'll suffer endlessly. Once your various internal energies came out, then you won't be able to save your life anymore, and you won't be able to die either. What I said before, I definitely cannot renege on it. If you don't join my sect, even if Yingying married you, I still wouldn't be able to impart to you this melding method. Even if my daughter blamed me for this for the rest of my life, I will still say the same thing. We have an important matter right now. We're going to Dongfang Bubai to settle some debt. Will you follow us?"

"Chief, please don't blame me. Junior has decided not to enter the Divine Sun Moon Sect." These two sentences were

said clearly and very firmly. There was no compromise in his voice.

When Ren Woxing and the other two heard this, their faces changed colour. Xiang Wentian said, "Why is that? You don't have any regards for the Divine Sun Moon Sect?"

Linghu Chong pointed to the corpses on the snow and said, "There are these kinds of people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect. Even though junior isn't worthy, I'll be ashamed to be associated with them. Also, junior promised Dingxian Shi Tai to be Heng-Shan School's headmaster."

Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying all showed a weird expression on their faces when they heard this. Linghu Chong not wanting to enter the sect was not strange at all. But his last sentence was extremely strange. The three people simply couldn't believe what they heard.

Ren Woxing pointed his finger at Linghu Chong's face. Suddenly, he burst out in laughter which shook the snow on the trees and made them fall down. He was again caught up in a wave of laughter before saying, "You... you... you want to become a nun? Go and become the leader of nuns?"

Linghu Chong answered unequivocally, "No, not to become a nun, but I'm going to become Heng-Shan School's headmaster. Just before Dingxian Shi Tai died, she requested this of me. If junior didn't agree, then she would've died with an unfulfilled wish. Dingxian Shi Tai died because of me. Junior knows that this matter is bound to astonish people when they hear this, but I had no way to refuse it." Ren Woxing was still laughing non-stop.

Yingying said, "Dingxian Shi Tai died because of me." Linghu Chong looked at her and felt appreciative towards her.

Ren Woxing slowly managed to stop his laughter. "If other people requested something of you, you'll always abide by them?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Correct. Dingxian Shi Tai died because she was carrying out my request."

Ren Woxing nodded. "That's also good! I'm an old freak and you're a little freak. If we don't do something unusual, how can we be great men? You go and become those nuns' headmaster. So you're going to Heng-Shan now?"

Linghu Chong shook his head. "No! Junior is going to Shaolin Temple."

Ren Woxing felt that was a bit strange but he immediately understood. "You're going to take the two Shi Tai's corpses back to Heng-Shan." He then turned his head towards Yingying and asked, "Are you going to follow Chong'er and go back to the Shaolin Temple?"

"No! I'm going to follow daddy," Yingying answered.

"That's right, it won't do for you to follow him up Heng-Shan to become a nun." After he said this, he again laughed loudly. This laughter sounded bitter.

Linghu Chong folded his hand in salute and bowed deeply. "Chief Ren, Brother Xiang, Yingying, we'll part ways here." He turned around and strode purposefully away. After he had walked more than ten steps away, he turned his head around and asked, "Chief Ren, when are you going to go up Dark Wood Cliff!"

Ren Woxing answered, "This is the sect's internal matter; outsiders don't need to worry about it." He knew that Linghu Chong asked because he wanted to be there to help him fight Dongfang Bubai together so he immediately rejected this help. Linghu Chong nodded his head and stooped down to pick up a long sword. He hanged the sword on his waist before turning around and then walked away.

# **Chapter 29: Headmaster**

**Translated by Pokit**

**Edited by Hhaung.**





**The four senior apprentices handed over the Buddhism instruments one by one. They were a book of Buddhism,**

**a wooden fish, a string of beads, and a short sword. Seeing the wooden fish and the beads, Linghu Chong felt quite embarrassed.]**

At dusk, Linghu Chong arrived at the Shaolin Temple and told the welcoming monk that he was there to take the remains of Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai back to Heng-Shan. The welcoming monk went in to report, and after some time, he came out to tell Linghu Chong, "Abbot said: The two Shi Tai's remains were cremated already. The monks in the temple are now reading scriptures to respectfully send them on their way. We'll send someone to deliver the ashes of the two Shi Tai to Heng-Shan."

Linghu Chong walked into the hall where they were praying for the two Shi Tai. He knelt in front of the altar with the ashes and the funeral tablet<sup>36</sup>, and respectfully kowtowed a few times. He inwardly prayed, "As long as Linghu Chong lives, I will carry Heng-Shan School forward with all my heart and might. I won't lose Shi Tai's trust in me." Later, he didn't ask to see Great Master Abbot but immediately went out of the temple after parting ways with the welcoming monk.

When he reached the bottom of the mountain, it was still snowing heavily so he quickly found a farmer's house to stay for the night. At dawn, he continued his journey to the north. When he arrived at a city, he bought a horse to ride on. Everyday, he travelled for around seventy to eighty li and as soon as he stopped by at an inn, he immediately moved his qi according to the method taught by Ren Woxing and slowly unblocked his meridian. After seven days, his left arm was able to move again normally.

One day while he was traveling, he was at a wine shop drinking wine when he noticed people busily walking here and there on the street. Many families were preparing for the New Year and there was an air of happiness around them. Linghu Chong poured himself another drink and thought, "On Huashan, Master-Wife has always led all the martial brothers and sisters in cleaning up, grinding the flour for New Year's cake, managing the New Year's red pockets<sup>37</sup>, and stitching new gowns. Little martial sister would be cutting many paper-cut window decorations. How

lively those New Years were. This year, I'm here all by myself drinking this stuffy wine."

As he was feeling melancholy, he suddenly heard the sound of people coming up the stairs. One person said, "I'm very thirsty. It wouldn't be bad drinking a few cups here."

Another person said, "If you're not thirsty, could it be that it's bad to drink?"

Another person replied, "Drinking wine is drinking wine, thirsty is thirsty. How can you mix these two matters together?"

Another person added, "The more you drink wine, the thirstier you'll get. Not only you can't mix these two matters together, they're completely different."

When Linghu Chong heard this, he knew that it was the Peach Valley Six Fairies who had just arrived. He felt really happy and shouted, "Six Peach Valley brothers, quickly come up and drink wine together with me."

Suddenly, a 'hu hu' sound reverberated around the room as the Peach Valley Six Fairies flew up the stairs. They rushed at Linghu Chong and grabbed his shoulders and arms. Then one by one called out, "I saw him first." "I grabbed him first." "I spoke first, Master Linghu heard me first." "If I didn't say that I wanted to come here, how could we have met him?"

Linghu Chong felt odd. He laughingly asked, "What tricks are you six playing at?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy went to the wine shop's window and called out loudly, "Young nuns, big nuns, old nuns, not old not young nuns! I, Peachtree Flower Fairy, have found Master Linghu, quickly hand me over the one thousand silver taels."

Peachtree Branch Fairy also went towards the window and called out, "I, Peachtree Branch Fairy, found him first. Big young nuns, quickly give me all the silver."

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy each grabbed one of Linghu Chong's arms and shouted, "I found him first!" "It was me! It was me!"

Then, from the end of the street, some female voices called out, "You've found hero Linghu?"

"I found Linghu Chong, quickly hand over the money," Peachtree Fruit Fairy called out.

"One hand gets the money, one hand delivers the goods!" Peachtree Trunk Fairy shouted.

"Right, right! If those small nuns don't want to pay their debts, then we'll hide Linghu Chong away and not give him to them," Peachtree Root Fairy agreed.

Peachtree Branch Fairy asked, "How do we hide him away? Do we shut him off somewhere and don't let those small nuns to meet him?"

There were sounds of people going up the stairs as a few females rushed up. The first person to reach the landing was really a disciple of the Heng-Shan School, Yihe. Behind her were four more nuns and two young ladies, who were Zheng E and Qin Juan. When the seven of them saw Linghu Chong, their faces filled with happiness. Some were calling him 'hero Linghu', some were calling 'big brother Linghu', and there were also some who called him 'Master Linghu'. Peachtree Trunk Fairy and his brothers extended their arms to block the path to Linghu Chong. "If you don't give us the thousand silver taels, then we won't deliver the goods."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "Peach Valley Six brothers, how did these one thousand silver taels come about?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy answered, "We met them just before and they asked me whether I've seen you or not. I said that temporarily I haven't met you yet, but we met you not long after that."

Qin Juan said, "This uncle is lying. He said: 'I haven't. Linghu Chong's feet are alive so it's most likely that he's at the end of the earth now. How could we have met him?'"

"Wrong, wrong. We had the foresight already that we were going to meet Linghu Chong here," Peachtree Flower Fairy disagreed.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy added, "That's right! Otherwise, why would we come here and not somewhere else?"

Linghu Chong laughed. "I've guessed it. These martial sisters are looking for me so they entrusted the six of you to help them look for me. Then you said that you wanted one thousand silver taels, isn't that right?"

"We asked for one thousand silver taels. We know it's an exorbitant price. But if they could do business, then it must be worth it. Who knew that they're very generous, this middle-aged nun said: 'Alright, once you've succeeded in finding hero Linghu, we'll give you one thousand silver taels.' Are these words true?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy explained.

Yihe answered, "Correct. Once they found hero Linghu, then Heng-Shan School will give them one thousand silver taels." Six palms immediately shot out and the Peach Valley Six Fairies said at the same time, "Hand it over."

"We're Buddhists. Why would we carry so much silver on us? I'd like to bother the six of you to go to Heng-Shan to fetch it," Yihe said.

She reasoned that the Peach Valley Six Fairies wouldn't want to be troubled. Who would've thought that they would think it over and answered at the same time, "Very well, we'll go up Heng-Shan with you to avoid you not paying your debt."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "Congratulations on becoming rich and selling me at such a great price."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies' orange-like faces were full of happiness. They cupped their hands and said, "Thank you, thank you! It's our luck, our luck!"

But Yihe and the other six women became grieved and they knelt towards Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong was surprised. "Why is everyone giving me such a big propriety?" and he hastily returned their propriety.

"We pay our respect to Headmaster," Yihe said.

"So you already knew? Please quickly get up."

"Yeah, it's not convenient talking while kneeling on the ground," Peachtree Root Fairy said.

Linghu Chong stood up and said, "Six Peach brothers, Heng-Shan School and I have a few important matters we have to discuss. Please drink wine on the side and don't bother us, otherwise you might not be getting your one thousand silver taels." Originally, the Peach Valley Six Fairies wanted to annoy them. But hearing that last sentence, they quickly shut up and walked to the table besides the window. They then ordered some wine and dishes.

Yihe and the other disciples stood up. As they thought of Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai dying miserably, they couldn't help crying sorrowfully.

Peachtree Flower Fairy interrupted, "Yi, strange, strange, how come you're crying suddenly? If you are crying after seeing Linghu Chong, then it's better not to have seen him then."

Linghu Chong glared angrily towards him. Frightened, Peachtree Flower Fairy quickly put his hand on his mouth.

Yihe was still crying as she said, "That day big brother Linghu... no, Headmaster, you went ashore to drink wine but didn't come back to the boat. Later on, Hengshan School's martial uncle Mo Da came and told us that you've gone to Shaolin temple to meet martial uncle Abbess and Master. We consulted with each other and decided that it's better for us to go to Shaolin temple to meet with all of you. But we didn't expect to meet many Jianghu heroes on the way, and we heard them talking passionately about how you led a group of heroes to attack Shaolin temple, and how the thousands of monks from Shaolin temple ran away. There was a person with a big head with short and plump body. He said his surname was Old. He said... he said that martial uncle Abbess and Master were killed in the Shaolin temple. Before martial uncle Abbess passed away, she wanted you... wanted you to take over the Headmaster position of Heng-Shan and that you've agreed to it. These words were already heard by a lot of people... " She said till here and started to sob uncontrollably. The remaining six disciples also started to weep.

Linghu Chong sighed. "It's true that Dingxian Shi Tai really put this heavy responsibility on my shoulder. But I'm just a young man and my reputation is really poor, and everyone already knows that I'm a loafer of poor character. How can I be the Headmaster of the Heng-Shan School? But it was just that the situation at that time forced me to agree. If I didn't agree, then Dingxian Shi Tai would've died with an unfulfilled wish. Ai, this is a very difficult matter."

"We... we all hope that you... hope that you come and take up the leadership of the Heng-Shan family," Yihe pleaded.

Zheng E reasoned, "Martial uncle Headmaster, you've led us going in and out of dangers, and you've also rescued many of the disciples' lives more than once. All the disciples of the Heng-Shan School already know that you're an upright gentleman. Even though you're a man, our school has no regulation that doesn't allow a man to be the Headmaster."

A middle-aged nun called Yiwen added, "When we heard the news of Master and Martial Uncle's deaths, we all felt very sad. But when we found out that Martial Uncle Headmaster is coming to take over the leadership of the school, we all felt really comforted as Heng-Shan School wouldn't be destroyed."

Yihe said, "My master and my two martial uncles were killed by someone. Heng-Shan School's three elders of the 'Ding' generation have successively died within these several months yet we don't know who the murderers are. Martial Uncle Headmaster, you becoming the Headmaster is the best thing possible. If you weren't our headmaster, then we would never be able to avenge our three elders."

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, "I take full responsibility for avenging the death of the three Shi Tai."

Qin Juan said, "You're already been driven out from Huashan School; so now you can be Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. West mountain or north mountain, we're on par with one another in Wulin. When you meet Mr. Yue in the future, you won't need to call him master anymore. At most, you call him Brother Yue."

Linghu Chong only smiled bitterly. He thought, "I don't have anymore face to meet this Brother Yue."

Zheng E said, "After we heard of this sad news, we doubled our effort to get to the Shaolin temple. On the way we met with Martial Uncle Mo Da again. He told us that you're not in the temple anymore but he wanted us to quickly look for you, Martial Uncle Headmaster."

Qin Juan continued the story, "Martial Uncle Mo Da said that the sooner we find you the better it would be. If we were late for a step then you may have been persuaded to enter the Devil Sect. The orthodox and the demonical cannot mix like that of water and fire. Heng-Shan School would then have no more Headmaster."

Zheng E glared at her and said, "Martial sister Qin talks without thinking. How can Martial Uncle Headmaster join the Devil Sect?"

"Yes, but Martial Uncle Mo Da really did say this," Qin Juan replied.

Linghu Chong thought, "Martial Uncle Mo Da is very concerned about this matter. Even though I didn't join the Sun Moon Sect, I very nearly did. That day, if Chief Ren didn't tempt me with the secret of the internal art, and if he had actually asked me sincerely and earnestly to join the sect, it would've been a very difficult decision for me. Also, considering Yingying's and big brother Xiang's parts in asking me, I might have immediately pledged my oath after attending to Heng-Shan School's big matter." He then said, "That's why you offered one thousand silver taels for the capture of Linghu Chong?"

Qin Juan broke from her tears and smiled. "Capture Linghu Chong? How could we dare?"

Zheng E said, "After everyone heard Martial Uncle Mo Da's instruction, we divided into groups of seven to look for Martial Uncle Headmaster, and to ask you to come up to Heng-Shan to handle the school's responsibilities. Today, when we met the Peach Valley Six Fairies, they asked for one thousand silver taels. To look for Martial Uncle Headmaster, don't mention one thousand silver taels, even if it were ten thousand silver taels, we would think of a way to give it to them."

Linghu Chong smiled. "There's no benefit for you when I become your Headmaster. But your skill in getting alms from corrupt officials, village bosses, and greedy rich people will surely advance by a lot." The seven disciples thought of that day in Fujian when they asked for alms from White Peeling Leather. Their sadness was slightly relieved and they all broke into smiles. "Alright, don't worry everyone. Linghu Chong already promised Dingxian Shi Tai so I can't just disregard what I said. I'll definitely become your Headmaster. We'll eat till we're full then we'll go up Heng-Shan." The seven disciples all rejoiced when they heard this.

Linghu Chong then drank some wine together with the Peach Valley Six Fairies. He asked the six of them what they wanted to



use one thousand silver taels for. Peachtree Root Fairy answered, "Night Cat Ji Wushi is extremely poor. If he didn't have one thousand silver taels, he wouldn't be able to live from day to day, so we promised to give him our help as best as we can."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy added, "That day inside the Shaolin temple, we brothers made a bet with Ji Wushi..."

Peachtree Flower Fairy interrupted, "Of course Ji Wushi lost. How could this little kid win from us brothers?"

But Linghu Chong thought, "You made a bet with Ji Wushi, of course the one who lost is you guys." He asked, "What did you bet on?"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered, "The matter we bet on concerns you. We guessed that you surely won't become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster, no... no... we guessed that you'll surely become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Night Cat guessed that you surely won't become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. We then said, gentleman's words must be believed. You already promised that old nun to become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. The world's heroes have already heard what you said, how could you deny it?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Night Cat said, Linghu Chong is loitering around Jianghu and soon he will take Devil Sect's Sacred Lady as his wife. Why does he want to chit chat with some old and young nuns?"

Linghu Chong thought, "Night Cat reveres Yingying completely. How can it be possible that he said 'Devil Sect'? It must be the Peach Valley Six Fairies who inverted their story telling." He then said, "So then you gambled one thousand silver taels on this?"

Peachtree Root Fairy replied, "Right, at that time, we were certain that we're going to win. Ji Wushi then said that this one thousand silver taels must be earned honestly and we can't steal it off people. We told him of course, would Peach Valley Six Fairies rob people?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Today, we met several of these nuns while they're looking for you. They said that they want to invite you to become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. We

agreed to help look for you for the cost of one thousand silver taels.”

Linghu Chong smiled and said, “You felt pitiful when you thought that Night Cat would lose one thousand silver taels to you. That’s why you wanted to earn one thousand silver taels to give to him, so that he could give this to you when he loses?”

Peach Valley Six Fairies answered at the same time, “That’s right, that’s right. Your prediction is really accurate.”

Peachtree Leaf Fairy added, “Compared to our prediction skill, your prediction skill doesn’t lack by too much.”

Afterwards, Linghu Chong and his party set out to Heng-Shan. On the day they finally arrived at the foot of the mountain, the disciples from the school were respectfully waiting at the foot of the mountain as they had received a message about the arrival. They quickly paid their respects to Linghu Chong when they saw him. Linghu Chong hastily returned their propriety. He told them how Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai passed away, and all of them felt grieved. Linghu Chong saw Yilin amongst the rest of the disciples. She seemed to be looking feeble and much thinner since the last time he saw her. He asked, “Martial sister Yilin, you’ve been unwell recently?”

Both of Yilin’s eyes were red as she answered, “It’s nothing.” After a moment, she continued, “You’re our headmaster now, so you can’t call me martial sister anymore.”

On their way to the mountain, Yihe and the rest of the disciples all called Linghu Chong as ‘Martial Uncle Headmaster’. He kept telling everyone not to call him that but none of them agreed. After hearing Yilin telling him not to call her ‘Martial Sister’, he said in a clear voice, “Martial sisters, Linghu Chong is taking the leadership of the Heng-Shan School’s family because of the former Abbess’s order. Actually, I don’t have the virtue or ability to do this job; I really don’t deserve it.”

All the disciples replied, “It’s actually the fortune of this school that Martial Uncle Headmaster is willing to take on this heavy responsibility.”

“Then everyone must promise me one thing,” Linghu Chong answered.

Yihe and the rest of the disciples said, "We would never disobey Headmaster's order."

"I'm only becoming your Martial Brother Headmaster, not your Martial Uncle Headmaster," Linghu Chong told them.

Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhen, Yiwen, and the rest of the older disciples consulted with each other and then reported back, "Headmaster is very modest, we'll obey your order."

Linghu Chong happily said, "That's very good."

Then they all went up the Heng-Shan mountain together. The summit of Heng-Shan was very tall. Even though everyone was walking really quickly, it still took them half a day to reach the Xianxing Peak after seeing it from afar. The main convent of the Heng-Shan School was the Wuse convent, which was a really small convent, while the other convent had more than thirty stone houses where the disciples resided in. Linghu Chong saw that the Wuse Convent only consisted of two rooms; one at the front and the other in the back. Compared to the grand temple of Shaolin, it was like comparing an ant to an elephant.

When he arrived inside the convent, he saw a statue of the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin. The inside of the convent was spotlessly clean and everything was arranged simply. He never thought that Heng-Shan School with such an earth-shattering name in Jianghu, would have such a plain convent. After paying his respect to the Guanyin deity, Yu Sao led him to Dingxian Shi Tai's meditation place, but he saw the four walls were dull and there was only an old putuan on the floor. Besides that, there was nothing else. Linghu Chong loved liveliness, drinking, and eating. How could he possibly stay in that quiet and calm room to meditate? If he took wine, dog meat or any meat in general into the room to eat and drink, then that would be too impolite towards everyone there. He then asked Yu Sao, "Even though I'm the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, I'm not a Buddhist and I'm also not a nun. The disciples of the school are all women while I'm a man; so living inside the convent isn't appropriate. Please give me and the Peach Valley Six Fairies an empty and far away house to live in. Then that'll be appropriate."

Yu Sao said, "Yes. The west peak has three big houses. They're originally guest houses, which we offered to the parents

of the school's disciples whenever they come for a visit. If they're acceptable to Headmaster then Headmaster can stay there temporarily while we build a new residence for Headmaster."

Linghu Chong happily replied, "It's already good that there's a house; why do you need to build a new house?", while he thought in his heart, "Could it be that I'll be Heng-Shan School's headmaster for the rest of my life? Once I've found a suitable person from the school to whom all the disciples will submit to, then I'll pass on this headmaster position to her. Then I'll pat my buttocks and travel around Jianghu leisurely and happily."

When he arrived at the house on the west peak, he saw the bed, mattress, chair, and the rest of the things resembled that of a rich farmer's house. Even though they were still simple and humble, they didn't appear as dull as in the convent. Yu Sao said, "Headmaster, please sit. I'll go and get you some wine."

Linghu Chong was happily surprised, "There's wine on this mountain?"

Yu Sao smiled and said, "Not only do we have wine, we have good wine here. When little martial sister Yilin heard that Headmaster is coming up Heng-Shan, she told me that if we don't have good wine, then she's afraid that you won't be headmaster for long. On that same night, we sent people to go down the mountain to buy many jars of good wine."

Linghu Chong felt embarrassed. He smiled and said, "Everyone worked so hard and spent so much money because of me. I don't think that's justified."

Yiqing smiled. "That day we got a lot of silver from White Peeling Leather. Even though we give half of it to the poor, we still have plenty remaining. Also, we already sold those government horses for some money. So Martial Brother Headmaster can drink for ten years or twenty years, we'll have enough money to buy wine." That night, Linghu Chong and Peach Valley Six Fairies drank to their hearts' content.

The next morning, he consulted with Yu Sao, Yiqing, Yihe and the other disciples on how to welcome the ashes of the two Shi Tai and how to avenge the three Shi Tai.

Yiqing said, "Martial Brother Headmaster has now taken the post of headmaster. So we must announce this to all the orthodox

people of Wulin, and we must also dispatch people to tell the Five Mountains Sword Schools' Chief, Martial Uncle Zuo."

Yihe indignantly said, "Pei, my master was killed by these traitors from Songshan School. The two martial uncles were most likely killed by them as well. What do we tell them for?"

Yiqing replied, "We mustn't lack any propriety. Wait until we have investigated this clearly. If the three honourables were really killed by Songshan School, then at that time, Martial Brother Headmaster will lead us to confront them about their sin."

Linghu Chong nodded his head. "What martial sister Yiqing said is true. But regarding the position of Headmaster, let me just do the job; there's no need for any celebration." He remembered the time when Master became the leader of Huashan. He was still very young at that time, and he recalled that there were so many formal celebrations. There were also numerous people from Wulin of the orthodox path who came up the mountain to congratulate his master and attend the ceremonies. He also remembered how the city of Hengshan was completely filled by many heroes for Hengshan School's Liu Zhengfeng's 'Gold Basin Hand Washing' ceremony.

Heng-Shan, Huashan, and Hengshan schools all had the same reputation. If there weren't many people turning up at the ceremony to congratulate him for taking up the Headmaster position, then it would be very humiliating. Even if there were many people attending, it is most likely for them to laugh at him for taking up the leadership of a group of nuns. Yiqing understood his heart so she said, "Since Martial Brother Headmaster doesn't want to alarm the friends in Wulin, we wouldn't invite guests to come up the mountain to attend the ceremony. But we must decide on a day for Headmaster to officially take up the position so that we can officially inform everyone."

Linghu Chong felt that if he took up the headmaster position of the Heng-Shan School too carelessly, it would damage Heng-Shan School's prestige and reputation since Heng-Shan is one of the five mountains sword schools. So he nodded his head agreeing to Yiqing.

Yiqing took up a calendar and perused it for some time. She then said, "Sixteenth of the second month, eight of the third month, twenty seventh of the third month, these three days are lucky days. Martial Brother Headmaster, have a look, which day is suitable?" Linghu Chong had never believed in any lucky or unlucky days. All he thought about in his heart was that the earlier the ceremony was, then the less people there would be to take part in the ceremony, and he would be able to avoid much embarrassment. So he said, "Is there any good days for this month?"

Yiqing answered, "There are actually many good days during this month. But they're all for going on a journey, breaking the ground<sup>38</sup>, wedding, opening a business, and others like that. It's not until the second month that there are good days for 'receiving seal and taking up office'."

Linghu Chong smiled. "I'm not taking up a government position so it's not really receiving a seal."

Yihe laughed. "Weren't you a general before? Becoming a headmaster is also receiving a seal."

Linghu Chong didn't want to brush away their ideas so he said, "Since it's like that, then make it the sixteenth of the second month."

Afterwards, they immediately sent disciples separately: to Shaolin temple to take back the two Shi Tai's ashes, and to other schools to give notifications. He told all the disciples who were going down the mountain not to publicly announce this matter. He also said, "You must report to the headmaster of each school that we haven't avenged Dingxian Shi Tai's death yet and that the disciples of Heng-Shan School are still in mourning, so there won't be any grand ceremony for the taking up of the headmaster's office. Please ask them not to send anyone to attend the ceremony."

After he talked to the departing disciples, Linghu Chong thought, "Since I'm now the headmaster of Heng-Shan, I must carefully research the sword art of the Heng-Shan School." He gathered the remaining disciples and tested each of their sword art from the basic introductory level martial art to the highest Heng-Shan sword art styles, which was displayed by Yihe and

Yiqing, two of the oldest disciples. Linghu Chong saw that the Heng-Shan School's sword art was defensively very tight, and the killing moves were frequently aimed at spots where other people least expected. However, it did not have enough swiftness or ferociousness. These martial arts were really suitable for women. All the previous master generations of Heng-Shan School had all been women, so their martial arts weren't as powerful or fierce like the ones that men used. But Heng-Shan School's sword art could be said to be one of the sword arts with the least amount of flaws in them. If speaking about their defence, they were just slightly below Wudang School's 'Taiji Sword Art'. But talking about how they could suddenly attack, these sword arts were above 'Taiji Sword Art'. Heng-Shan School was one of the most outstanding schools in Wulin, so it had its own unique skills.

In his mind, he carefully went over the drawings engraved on the cave wall on Huashan. There were some Heng-Shan School's sword arts drawn there, which had wonderful variations, and were far above the sword art that Yihe and Yiqing were using. Even though this set of sword art had been defeated by other people, if in the future Heng-Shan School wanted to be glorious in Wulin, then its basic skills needed to be improved. He also thought of the time he saw Dingjing Shi Tai fighting with other people. Her internal energy was abundant and her moves were fierce. She was really very far above Yihe and the other disciples. He had also heard that Dingxian Shi Tai's martial art was even higher. It seemed that the three senior Shi Tai had not imparted a great deal of their martial art to their disciples yet. When the three Shi Tai had successively passed away in the last several months, many of Heng-Shan School's wonderful martial art had possibly been lost forever.

Yihe saw him without any expressions on his face and noticed that he didn't comment on any of the disciples' sword arts. So she said, "Martial brother Headmaster, you must be looking down on our sword art, please give us some advice."

Taking the sword from Yihe's hand, Linghu Chong replied, "There's this set of Heng-Shan School's sword art; I don't know if the three Shi Tai had imparted it to you or not?" and started to show the Heng-Shan School's sword art engraved on the cave

wall. He was doing the moves really slowly to let the disciples see it clearly. After a few moves, all the disciples started cheering. They saw that each move of his still contained the basic essence of Heng-Shan's sword art, but the variations were wonderful. They didn't know just how much higher in level this set was when compared to each of the sets they had learnt in the past. Everyone was looking at each move enthusiastically and they felt pleased seeing it. The engraving of this set of sword moves on the cave wall was dead, so when Linghu Chong was using it, he linked them up one by one. In between each move, it was unavoidable that he had to add some of his idea into it. When he finally finished showing them this set of sword art, all the disciples cheered and they all bowed saluting him.

Yihe said, "Martial brother Headmaster, this is clearly our Heng-Shan School's sword art, but we've never seen it before. I'm afraid even my master and the two martial uncles didn't know about this sword art. Where did you learn it?"

Linghu Chong answered, "I saw it on a mountain cave wall. If you were willing to learn it, then how about if I imparted this sword art to you?" All the disciples were happy to hear this and they thanked him. That day Linghu Chong imparted three moves to them. He explained the intricacies of those three moves clearly and personally conducted the drills.

Even though it was only three moves from the sword art, these three moves were extremely profound and deep. Even the brightest and the most skilled disciples such as Yihe and Yiqing took seven to eight days to learn it. When it came to Zheng E, Yilin, Qin Juan, and the others, it was even more difficult for them to comprehend it. After nine days, Linghu Chong imparted two more moves to them. There were not many moves in this set of sword arts engraved on the cave wall. But they had actually spent more than one month before they completed rudimentary training. As to the mastery of this sword art, it depended on each person's ability and comprehension.

After more than a month, the disciples who were sent as emissaries started to return from their trip one by one, and for the most part, they didn't look pleased at all. They were afraid to talk when they reported to Linghu Chong. He knew for sure



without asking that they had been ridiculed as a group of nuns wanting a man to be their headmaster. All he could do was console them with words. Then he asked them to separately learn from their martial sisters the sword art he had imparted to them. If there were anything they weren't clear about, then he would personally advise them.

Two experienced disciples, Yu Sao and Yiwen were sent to Huashan to deliver the epistle. The distance between Heng-Shan and Huashan wasn't that far, so they should have returned much earlier. Even when all the disciples who went to the south had returned, Yu Sao and Yiwen still hadn't come back yet. As they neared the sixteenth of the second month, the day for taking office, and still hadn't seen any sign of Yu Sao and Yiwen, they sent two more disciples, Yiguang and Yishi, to go to their aid.

The disciples did not anticipate any sect or school sending anyone to attend the ceremony, so they didn't prepare any lodging or food for guests. However, everyone had earlier weeded the ground, swept all the rooms clean, and sewn new gowns and shoes to wear. Zheng E and some disciples had sewn a black gown for Linghu Chong to wear for this day. Heng-Shan was the north mountain among the five mountains and the colour of their uniform was black.

On the morning of the sixteenth of the second month, when Linghu Chong got out after getting out of bed, he saw lamps and festoons hanging from the top of each house, showing the day's happy occasion. Seeing the care and dedication that went into making each of the decoration and securely arranging them, Linghu Chong again felt ashamed, but he also felt appreciation towards them. He thought, "The two Shi Tai died tragically because of me, but they didn't blame me for it. Instead, they gave much regards to me. If Linghu Chong couldn't avenge the three Shi Tai then I'll be a useless person."

Suddenly, he heard someone shouting from behind the corner of the mountain, "A'lin, A'lin, your dad has come to look at you. Are you well? A'lin, your dad's here." His voice was booming, shaking the valley, and before the echo had finished, he again shouted, "A'lin... A'lin... your dad..." Yilin had already heard his voice so she quickly got out of the convent and called out, "Dad,

dad!" Then from around the corner of the mountain, a tall and strong monk emerged. It was really Yilin's father, Monk No Commandment, and there was also another monk behind him. The two of them were walking really fast and in a short time had reached the convent. Monk No Commandment loudly exclaimed, "Master Linghu, you didn't die from your heavy injuries, and now you're going to become my daughter's headmaster. That's very good!"

Linghu Chong smiled. "This is thanks to Great Master."

Yilin walked up to her father and lovingly pulled on his arm. She smiled, "Dad, you know today is the day that big brother Linghu officially takes up office as the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. Did you come here to congratulate him?"

No Commandment laughed. "There's no need for congratulation. I'm here to join the Heng-Shan School. Everyone is from the same school, what's there to congratulate?"

Linghu Chong was startled and he quickly asked, "Great Master wants to join Heng-Shan School?"

No Commandment answered, "Yeah. My daughter is in Heng-Shan School. I'm her old man, so naturally I'm also in the Heng-Shan School. His granny, I heard everyone ridiculing you. They're saying that you're a man but you want to become the headmaster of a bunch of nuns and young ladies. His granny, they didn't know that you're full of passion and righteousness. The mind..." His eyebrows turned into a smile and it appeared that he was really happy. He looked at his daughter and said, "Old man punched that guy's mouth and broke all his teeth. I shouted to him, "You little kid knows fart! How can everyone in Heng-Shan School be all nuns and young ladies? Old man is from Heng-Shan School, even though old man has a shiny head, do you think I'm a nun? I'm going to pull my pants down to give you a look!" So I pulled my pants down but this kid fell down and then ran away. Haha, haha!" Linghu Chong and Yilin both laughed freely when they heard this.

Yilin smiled. "Dad, you're so crude in doing things. You're also not afraid of people laughing at you!"

No Commandment replied, "If I didn't let him look clearly, then this kid still wouldn't know whether I'm a nun or a monk.

Brother Linghu, I've joined the Heng-Shan School. I've also brought this grand disciple along. Cannot Have No Commandment, quickly greet Headmaster Linghu."

While Monk No Commandment was speaking, the monk following him had his back turned towards them for the whole time, not willing to look at Linghu Chong or Yilin. As he turned around, his face was full of embarrassment. He looked at Linghu Chong and smiled slightly. Linghu Chong felt that this monk looked familiar but he couldn't figure out who he was. Then, he was startled as he unexpectedly recognised the Ten Thousand Miles Loner Tian Boguang. He was totally amazed and blurted out, "It's... it's Brother Tian?"

That monk was really Tian Boguang. He smiled bitterly then bowed towards Yilin. "Greet... greeting Master."

Yilin was also very surprised. "How... how did you become a Buddhist? Is it a disguise?"

Great Master No Commandment was feeling proud of himself and he laughingly answered, "This is the real thing and he's not deceiving anyone here. He had really become a monk. Cannot Have No Commandment, tell your master what your Buddhist name is."

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly and said, "Master, grand Martial Master gave me a Buddhist name called 'Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Yilin asked strangely, "What 'Cannot Have No Commandment'? How can there be such a long name?"

Her father replied, "What do you know? In Buddhist scripture, what does it matter how long the Buddha's name is! 'Buddha of Compassion and Sorrow Helps the Distressed and Watches the World's Voice', isn't that name long? 'Cannot Have No Commandment' only has four words in his name, how can that be long?"

Yilin nodded. "So that's how it is. How did he become a Buddhist? Dad, was it you who took him as your disciple?"

No Commandment answered, "No. He's your disciple; I'm his grand martial grandpa. But you're only a little nun and since he had already paid his respect to take you as his master, if he didn't become a monk, then he would've ruined the good name

of Heng-Shan School. That's why I advised him to become a monk."

Yilin laughingly said, "What do you mean advised him? Dad, you must've forced him to become a Buddhist, didn't you?"

"He voluntarily did it; you can't force someone to become a Buddhist. Whatever goodness this person has, there's an equal amount of badness in him. That's why I gave him the Buddhist name of 'Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Yilin's face became slightly red as she understood the meaning behind her father's words. This Tian Boguang was a very lecherous person and he was somehow captured by her father in the past. At that time, his life was spared but a lot of strange punishments were heaped on him. This time, it seemed that he had been forced to become a monk.

Then No Commandment continued, "My Buddhist name is No Commandment, so I don't adhere to any rules or commandments. But this Tian Boguang has committed a lot of bad things in Jianghu. If he didn't abstain from committing more of these piles of misdemeanours, how can he be under your school and become your disciple? Master Linghu wouldn't have liked this also. In the future, he's going to receive my alms bowl; that's why his name also has the words 'No Commandment'."

They suddenly heard a person said, "Monk No Commandment and Monk Cannot Have No Commandment are both joining the Heng-Shan School. The Peach Valley Six Fairies are also going to join Heng-Shan School."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies had come and the one who spoke just then was Peachtree Trunk Fairy.

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "We were the first people to see Linghu Chong, so the six of us are big martial brothers, while Monk No Commandment is little martial brother."

Linghu Chong thought, "Since there are Great Master No Commandment and Tian Boguang in Heng-Shan School already, there's no harm in accepting the Peach Valley Six Fairies as well. This way, it'll remove those talks in Jianghu about Linghu Chong becoming the headmaster of a group of nuns and young ladies." He then said, "Peachtree Six brothers are willing to enter the Heng-Shan School, then that's really good then. But it's very

troublesome to arrange the seniority order one by one so it's better if we just leave it alone!"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "No Commandment's disciple is called Cannot Have No Commandment. When in the future, Cannot Have No Commandment accepts a disciple, what will his Buddhist name be?"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered, "Cannot Have No Commandment's disciple's Buddhist name must also have the words 'Cannot Have No Commandment'. He can be called, 'Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Then the disciple of 'Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'; what would his Buddhist name be?"

Linghu Chong saw Tian Boguang's plight so he took his arm and led him away. "I have a few words to ask you."

"Alright," Tian Boguang answered.

The two of them quickened their steps and moved tens of feet away. But behind them, they still heard Peachtree Trunk Fairy saying, "His Buddhist name can be 'With Reason and Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Peachtree Flower Fairy added, "Then how about disciple of 'With Reason and Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'? What would his Buddhist name be?"

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly and said, "Headmaster Linghu, that day I was forced by Grand Martial Master to go to Huashan to invite you to come and see the little Shi Tai. But there's a long story behind that."

Linghu Chong said, "I know that he forced you to take a poison, and he also tricked you by saying that he'd already sealed your death acupoint."

"I've already told you about that before. That day in the courtyard of the Jade House, I fought with that shorty Yu. After that, I thought about it and decided that there were too many heroes from the orthodox path for me to stay there for long. So I went north towards Hunan. I'm ashamed to talk about those days. My shortcoming became visible not long after. In Kaifeng prefecture, I sneaked into the room of a rich family's young lady in the middle of the night. I lifted the mosquito net and extended

my hands to cop a feel, but I unexpectedly felt a bald head instead.”

Linghu Chong laughed and said, “So to your surprise, she’s a nun.”

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. “No, it was a monk.”

Linghu Chong laughed loudly. “The young lady was inside the quilt sleeping with a monk. Never thought that this young lady would’ve stolen a man, and the man she’d stolen would be a monk.”

Tian Boguang shook his head and said, “That’s not it! That monk was Grand Martial Master. Originally, Grand Martial Master was looking for me. When he finally tracked my trail down, he found me at Kaifeng prefecture. That afternoon I was spying around that house and Grand Martial Master saw me. He guessed that I was up to no good, so he talked to that family and told that young lady to get out of trouble. Then he slept on that bed waiting for me.”

Linghu Chong laughed. “Brother Tian must have really suffered this time.”

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. “Does that need saying? When I rubbed Grand Martial Master’s head, I already knew that something’s not right. Then I felt my stomach felt numb because he hit my acupoint there. Grand Martial Master jumped out of the bed and lighted a lamp. Then he asked me whether I want to die or live. I know that for my whole life I’ve been doing evil things, so there would be one day when I’d have a reckoning. So I quickly said, ‘I want to die!’. Grand Martial Master thought that this was really strange so he asked me: ‘Why do you want to die?’ I said: ‘I wasn’t being careful and was captured by you. How can I still hope to live?’ Grand Martial Master gave me a blank expression then indignantly said, ‘You said you were captured by me only because you weren’t careful. So you are implying that if you were a bit more careful, then I wouldn’t be able to capture you. Alright!’ As he said ‘alright’, he released my acupoint. Then I sat down and asked him: ‘What is your order?’ He said: ‘You have a knife on your belt, how come you’re not using it to chop me? You have two legs underneath your body, how come you’re not jumping out of the window to escape?’ I said: ‘I’m a gentleman,

how can I act like a shameless nobody?' He just laughed loudly and said: 'You're not a shameless nobody? You already paid respect to my daughter to take her as your master and yet how come you're disclaiming it?' I thought this was really strange so I asked: 'Your daughter?' He answered: 'On the top floor of that wine shop, you made a bet with that youngster from Huashan School. Saying that whoever lost would take my daughter as master. Could it be that it's all fake? I went up Heng-Shan to look for my daughter, and she told me everything from the beginning to the end.' I said: 'So that's how it is. That little nun is your daughter, that's really weird.' He asked: 'What's weird about that?'"

Linghu Chong laughed. "This matter really is quite strange. Other people become a monk after they've gotten a daughter, but Great Master No Commandment became a monk first before getting a daughter. His Buddhist name is called No Commandment. It means that he won't comply with any rules or commandments."

Tian Boguang said, "That's right. At that time, I said: 'That bet was only a trick, how could you take it as real? You're not wrong that I lost the fight in that bet, so I won't bother your daughter anymore.' Grand Martial Master then said: 'That won't do. You already said that you're going to take her as master, so you must take her as your master. You cannot not take my daughter as a master. I can't let anyone bully my own daughter. I spent a lot of effort to find you. You're very slippery and if it weren't for you committing these rapes, then it would've been really difficult to capture you.'

I saw him getting muddled and not speaking clearly, so I quickly used my 'Three Cloud Steps' and jumped out of the window. I thought that once I've used my lightness martial art, Grand Martial Master would definitely not be able to keep up with me. But I was surprised when I heard footsteps behind me because Grand Martial Master had chased me down. I called out: 'Big monk, you didn't kill me just then, so I won't kill you either. If you kept on chasing then I won't be polite anymore.' Grand Martial Master laughed loudly and said: 'How do you become impolite?' I pulled my knife out, turned around, and chopped

down on him. But Grand Martial Master's martial art was really high. He only used his palms to trade moves with me. I didn't know how to use my fast knife to chop him, and after more than forty moves, he grabbed the back of my neck and snatched my knife away.

Then he asked me: 'Give up yet?' I said: 'I give up, you can kill me now!' He said: 'What's the use of killing you? Would it make my daughter alive again?' I was startled so I asked: 'Little Shi Tai is dead?' He said: 'She hasn't died yet, but she's as good as dead. I saw her at Heng-Shan and she was so thin that I can even see her bones. I cried when I saw her, and then I slowly asked her what happened. It was you who harmed her.' I said: 'If you wanted to kill me then kill me. Tian Boguang is an honest person and would never tell lies. I was rude to your daughter at first, but she was saved by Huashan School's Linghu Chong. I didn't violate her; she's still a young lady as pure as jade.' Grand Martial Master said: 'Your granny, what's the use of being as pure as jade? My daughter is lovesick; if Linghu Chong wouldn't take her as his wife, she wouldn't continue on living. But when I mentioned this to her, my daughter scolded me. She said something like Buddhists cannot have worldly desires; otherwise Buddha reproaches them and when you die you enter the eighteenth level of Hell.' Suddenly he clutched my neck and scolded me, 'Stinky kid, this is all your doing. If you weren't being rude to my daughter that day then Linghu Chong wouldn't have to come and save her. Then my daughter wouldn't have become that thin.' I said: 'That's not for certain. Little Shi Tai's beauty is like a goddess, even if I weren't being rude to her that day, Linghu Chong would certainly have come up with another reason to approach her'."

Linghu Chong scowled and said, "Brother Tian, what you said was too much."

Tian Boguang laughed and said, "I'm sorry that I offended you. At that time, the situation was desperate. If I didn't say that, Grand Martial Master would never have released me. Sure enough, when he heard this, he turned from angry to happy and said: 'Stinky kid, think for yourself how many bad things you have done in your lifetime? If it weren't for the discourteous way



you treated my daughter, I would've flattened your head a long time ago.'"

Linghu Chong felt this was very odd, so he asked, "He's happy that you're being rude to her daughter?"

Tian Boguang answered, "He wasn't being happy, he was praising my foresight."

Linghu Chong couldn't help smiling. Tian Boguang went on, "Grand Martial Master lifted me in mid air with his left hand while his right hand gave me seventeen to eighteen whacks on the ear and I fainted. Then he soaked me in a small brook. When I woke up, he said: 'I'm giving you one month to go and invite Linghu Chong to go up Heng-Shan to see my daughter. Even if he couldn't take her as his wife for now, they can still talk and that'll be good enough. My daughter's life would be protected then. Your master has a problem but how come you didn't come and help as her disciple?' He then poked some of my acupoints and told me that they're the death acupoints. Then he forced me to take some poison saying that if I managed to invite you to come and see the little Shi Tai within the one month period, he would give me the medicine. Otherwise, the poison would come out and no medicine would be able to save me."

Linghu Chong had at last understood. That day when Tian Boguang came up to Huashan to invite him to come down the mountain, he kept everything a secret and didn't want to say anything clearly. Linghu Chong didn't expect that he would actually tell him everything at this time. Tian Boguang continued, "I went up Huashan to invite you, but I was defeated and I knew that it would be hard to keep my life further. To my surprise, Grand Martial Master was feeling uneasy so he personally took the little Shi Tai to come up to Huashan to look for you. Then he gave me the antidote, and afterwards I also listened to your advice not to rape and do those lecherous things anymore. But Tian Boguang's nature is lascivious and there are lots of women around. So whenever I have some money, I went to look for some prostitutes which is not a difficult thing to do. Half a month ago, Grand Martial Master found me again. He said that you were going to become Heng-Shan School's headmaster, but other people are ridiculing you behind your back and your

reputation in Jianghu is being ruined. He loves everything, loves his daughter and son-in-law..."

Linghu Chong scowled and interrupted, "Brother Tian, you must never speak of this nonsense ever again."

Tian Boguang replied, "Yes, yes. I was just repeating what Grand Martial Master said. He said that he wanted to join Heng-Shan School and told me to follow his plan. The first step was to accept me as a disciple on behalf of his daughter. I didn't consent to this so he beat me up. I'm not his match and I also couldn't run away so I was forced to pay my respect to Master." He said till here when he frowned and his expression turned dark.

Linghu Chong said, "You only have to pay your respect to your master. It doesn't mean that you have to become a monk as well. Doesn't Shaolin School have a lot of secular disciples?"

Tian Boguang shook his head and answered, "Grand Martial Master had another idea. He said: 'You're such a lecherous person. Once you've entered Heng-Shan School, your martial uncles will all be beautiful nuns, so that's going to be very inappropriate. The best plan would be to cut out the source of trouble first.' He then knocked me down, pulled my pants down, grabbed his knife and gave me a chop. He cut half of my thing."

Linghu Chong uttered an 'ah' as he was startled by this, and shook his head. Even though he felt that this was very cruel, he also thought that Tian Boguang had harmed too many women of good families, so it was a deserved retribution. Tian Boguang was also shaking his head before he continued, "I fainted immediately. When I woke up, Grand Martial Master had applied some medicine on me and had also wrapped up my injury. He told me to rest for a few days to recover from my injury. Then he forced me to shave my head and become a monk. He gave me a Buddhist name called 'Cannot Have No Commandment'. He said: 'Since I already chopped your thing, you can't rape anymore. So, of course there's no need for you to become a monk. But I made you become a monk and gave you the Buddhist name 'Cannot Have No Commandment' so that everyone will know. That way, Heng-Shan School's reputation will also be preserved. Ordinarily, it's inappropriate for people who have become a monk to mix up

with nuns. But since your name is 'Cannot Have No Commandment', then it doesn't matter.'"

Linghu Chong smiled and said, "Your Grand Martial Master is very thoughtful."

Tian Boguang replied, "Grand Martial Master wanted me to tell you about all these. He also wants me to ask you not to blame my master."

Confused, Linghu Chong asked, "Why would I want to blame your master? She doesn't know anything about this matter."

Tian Boguang answered, "Grand Martial Master said: Every time he saw my master, he noticed how she became a little bit thinner and her complexion a little worse. When he asked her about it, she always sheds a tear and never says anything. Grand Martial Master said: It must be you who's bullying her."

Linghu Chong was alarmed. "I didn't! I never talk to your master in an angry manner. Also, she's always so good, why would I scold her?"

Tian Boguang said, "You never scolded her, that's why she cried."

"I don't understand."

"Grand Martial Master beat me up when I asked about this too."

Linghu Chong scratched his head thinking that Great Master No Commandment's entangled way of speaking was just like that of the Peach Valley Six Fairies.

Tian Boguang said, "Grand Martial Master said: after he got married to Grand Martial Mother, they quarrelled all the time, and the fiercer the scolding was, the more love there was. You're not scolding my master so it means that you're not taking my master to be your wife."

"This... your master is a Buddhist nun, so I've never thought of this matter."

"I also said that. Grand Martial Master got angry and beat me up for a time. He said: my Grand Martial Mother was originally a nun and when he wanted to marry her, he became a monk. If Buddhist nuns or monks couldn't get married, how can there be my master in this world? If my master isn't in this world, how can there be me?"

Linghu Chong couldn't help thinking that this was funny. He thought Tian Boguang was much older compared to Little Martial Sister Yilin; how could he mention those two things together? Tian Boguang went on, "Grand Martial Master also said: if you didn't think of marrying my master, then what are you doing becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster? He said: there are a lot of nuns in Heng-Shan School but not one can be compared to my master's beauty. If you didn't do it for my master, then for which nun are you doing it for?"

Linghu Chong was secretly feeling miserable and couldn't take this anymore, he thought, "Great Master No Commandment became a monk so that he could marry a nun. He now thinks that everyone in the world thinks the same way as him. If these words got out, how could it not cause a lot of problem?"

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. "Grand Martial Master asked me whether my master is the most beautiful woman in the whole world. I answered: 'She's not the most beautiful, but she's very beautiful.' He got angry and punched me causing two of my teeth to fall off. Then he said: 'How come she's not the most beautiful? If she weren't beautiful, then why did you have rude intentions towards her on that day? And why did that little kid Linghu Chong risked his life to save her?' I quickly said: 'Most beautiful, most beautiful. How could Grand Martial Master's daughter not be the most beautiful woman in the world?' When he heard these words, he became happy and praised my brilliant vision."

Linghu Chong smiled. "Little martial sister Yilin is of course beautiful, it's no wonder that great Master No Commandment is proud of her."

Tian Boguang happily said, "You agree that my master is beautiful; that's very good then."

Linghu Chong oddly asked, "Why is that good?"

"Grand Martial Master gave me a task, he wants me to think of a way to call you... call you..."

"Call me what?" Linghu Chong asked.

Tian Boguang smiled. "Call you my master-husband."

Linghu Chong was stupefied. "Brother Tian, Great Master No Commandment loves his daughter a lot. But you should already

know that this matter is impossible to do.”

“That’s true. I said that’s really hard to do, I said that you once led a large group of people to attack Shaolin temple because of Divine Sect’s young lady Ren. I said: ‘Even though young lady Ren’s beauty isn’t above my master, Master Linghu was already predestined to be with her. He’s already infatuated with her and other people wouldn’t be able to interfere.’ Master Linghu, in front of Grand Martial Master, I had no choice but to say this in order to protect my remaining teeth so I have something to eat with, please don’t blame me.”

Linghu Chong smiled and said, “Of course I understand.”

“Grand Martial Master then said: He already knows about this and that it’s very easy to solve this problem because all that is required is to think of a way to kill young lady Ren without you knowing. I quickly said not to do that because if young lady Ren were killed, then Linghu Chong would definitely commit suicide. Grand Martial Master said: ‘What you said was right. If this little kid Linghu Chong died, then my daughter will be widowed, how can that be not a bad luck? How about this? You talk to this little kid Linghu Chong; tell him my daughter will marry him and make his second house. This will be alright.’ I said: ‘Grand Martial Master, how can you wrong your daughter like that?’ He sighed then said: ‘You don’t know. If my daughter couldn’t marry Linghu Chong, she would die sooner or later; she definitely won’t have a long life.’ As he said this, his tears flowed down. Ai, this is their father-daughter inborn nature revealing their true feelings, it couldn’t be fake.”

The two of them were looking at each other, both of them feeling pretty awkward. Tian Boguang then said, “Master Linghu, I’ve already said everything that Grand Martial Master wanted me to tell you. I know that some of these are hard to do, even taboo, especially since you’re the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. But I advise you to speak more to my master and let her be happy. You can deal with this later on.”

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, “Alright.” In the last few days, every time he had seen Yilin, she seemed to be thinner and thinner. He now knew that it was because she was lovesick. Yilin loved him so deeply; how come he didn’t know? But she was

a Buddhist nun and still very young, so he expected her feelings would lessen as days passed by and would finally be gone. After meeting her again at Xianxia mountain range, and from Fujian to Jiangxi, he was never alone with her to talk about anything. Ever since he had been on Heng-Shan, he avoided doing anything that might rouse suspicion. He didn't care if other people slandered his own name, as his name was already not good, but he felt he must never spoil the clean reputation of the Heng-Shan School. Besides the time he was imparting the sword art to the Heng-Shan's female disciples, he never chatted with anyone. Compared to the past days of clowning around, he was very different. As he listened to Tian Boguang speaking of the past, and about Yilin's tender feelings towards him, feelings suddenly burst forth in his heart.

He looked up towards the mountain peak where the white snow was accumulating as he pondered. Suddenly, he heard the clamouring sounds of people coming up the mountain path. The mountain summit had always been quiet and peaceful, and there was never people shouting or making noises. He was really astonished when he heard footsteps of several hundred people coming up the mountain. The first person called out, "Congratulations, Master Linghu. Today is your happy day." This person was short and plump; he was Old Man. Behind him were Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, Huang Boliu, Sima Big, Blue Phoenix, You Xun, the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, and many other people who had unexpectedly come here.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He quickly went forward to welcome them. "I received Dingxian Shi Tai's last order so I must take the leadership of the Heng-Shan School, but I didn't dare to alarm all the friends here. How come you've all come here?"

These people had once followed Linghu Chong in attacking Shaolin temple and had gone through life and death battles with him. So they had become friends through trials and tribulations. They came up the mountain one by one and circled him. Old Man said in a loud and clear voice, "Everyone heard that Master managed to get Sacred Lady out, and we all felt really happy. This matter of Master taking up the headmaster position of Heng-

Shan School; it was already known in Jianghu for quite a long time. If we didn't come up the mountain today to give our congratulations, then we deserve to die." These heroes were upright and straightforward people, after talking for a short while, they were able to joke around.

Ever since he had taken residence on Heng-Shan, Linghu Chong had only been around a group of nuns and young ladies so he had to talk with the utmost restriction. Now, suddenly, as he found so many old friends around him, he was extremely happy. Huang Boliu said, "We're uninvited guests so Heng-Shan School certainly hasn't prepared any food or drink for us. So we brought food and wine up the mountain."

Linghu Chong happily said, "That's very good then." He thought, "This situation is starting to resemble that big assembly on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge."

As they were talking, around a few hundred people had come up the mountain. Ji Wushi smiled and said, "Master, we're all people from the same family so there's no need to be polite. Your educated and cultured female disciples shouldn't come and greet crude people like us. So it's best if we just talk amongst ourselves."

Now he found the mountain peak very noisy and lively. Heng-Shan School certainly didn't expect that so many guests would suddenly turn up to congratulate them, so all of them became excited. There were some old disciples who were more experienced; they saw that the guests who had come to congratulate them were neither fish nor fowl. Even though there were a few well known heroes, they were all masters from the demonical path. Also, a lot of them were heroes and thieves from the dark path. Heng-Shan School's rules were strict and all the disciples guarded themselves strictly. Not only do they have a lot of contact with people from the orthodox path, they have not paid much attention to them. Unexpectedly, a large group of unorthodox people had come up to the peak today. But they saw their headmaster was holding and pulling on their hands, looking very close, and talking to them nicely.

At noon, several hundred men brought chicken, duck, cow, sheep, wine, and many other dishes to the top of the mountain.

Linghu Chong thought, "The peak of the mountain is a sacred ground for the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin. I'm the Headmaster here, but if we were to eat fish and meat, kill pigs and slaughter sheep, we will be offending the ancestors of the Heng-Shan School. I would be sorry to let this happen." He immediately told these people to cook the dishes on the mountainside. However, the smell of the wine and meat drifted up to the mountaintop which caused many nuns to secretly scowl. After these heroes cooked their meals, they went to the front of the convent to sit inside the large open area there. Linghu Chong sat on the west side while the several hundred female disciples sat behind him according to their seniority. They were waiting until the lucky hour to initiate the "taking up the office" ceremony.

Suddenly, they heard the sounds of a group of people playing flutes coming nearer. Two old men with green gowns strode up the mountain. The group of heroes uttered "yi, ah" from everywhere and many people stood up. The old man on the left, with a yellow complexion, cried out in a clear voice, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's Chief Dongfang's delegates Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun come to congratulate Hero Linghu's honour in becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster. We wish Heng-Shan School to be prosperous and Headmaster Linghu to be prestigious in Wulin."

When he finished his speech, the group of heroes uttered an 'ah' and exploded in cheers. Half of these unorthodox path's heroes were connected to the Devil Sect, and among them, there were people who had taken Dongfang Bubai's 'Three Brain Corpse Pill'. So when they heard the words 'Chief Dongfang' mentioned, they were scared to death. The group of heroes didn't recognise who these two people were, but they had long heard of their names. The person on the left was called 'Honourable Yellow Face' Jia Bu, while the one on the right was called Shangguan Yun, with the nickname 'Eagle Hero'. The martial arts of these two people were high; it was said that their martial arts were way above those of all the headmasters, chiefs, and clan leaders in Wulin. The services and qualifications of these people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect weren't extremely impressive. But over the last many years, the sect had undergone a big change. Many



older members such as Xiang Wentian and others were removed or went into seclusion. At the present time, Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun were two of the most powerful and first-class figures in the sect and it can be said that Dongfang Bubai was giving Linghu Chong a lot of respect by sending the two of them here.

Linghu Chong went forward to welcome them. "Mr. Dongfang and I have no acquaintance with each other. I don't deserve your two honourable presences."

Linghu Chong saw that 'Honourable Yellow Face' Jia Bu had a thin face resembling a candle, and his two Taiyang acupoints were very pronounced as if each point has a piece of peach underneath. The 'Eagle Hero' Shangguan Yun, with long arms, long legs, and an air of assured authority, had glitteringly bright eyes. These indicated that the two of them had profound internal energy.

Jia Bu said, "Today is Hero Linghu's big day. Chief Dongfang said that originally he wanted to congratulate you personally. But there are too many matters of the sect that are hindering him, and since there's no way for him to be in two places at once, he asked Headmaster Linghu not to blame him."

"I wouldn't dare," Linghu Chong replied, while he thought in his heart, "It looks as if Dongfang Bubai is still flourishing which means Chief Ren still hasn't snatched the leadership of the sect yet. I wonder how Chief Ren, Brother Xiang, and Yingying are doing right now."

Jia Bu leaned to one side and indicated with a wave of his left hand. "Here are some meagre gifts, small tokens of regards from Chief Dongfang. Headmaster Linghu, please accept them." Amidst the sound of flutes, more than a hundred people brought forth forty large red boxes. Each box was being carried by four strong men, and from the heavy steps of each man, it seemed that the items inside the boxes weren't light.

Linghu Chong quickly refused, "Linghu Chong is already honoured by the presence of your two honourable; I would never dare to receive these gifts. Also, please reply to Mr. Dongfang that Linghu Chong said many thanks. On this mountain, Heng-

Shan School's disciples live frugally but have a clean and honest life, so we have no use for these splendid and expensive items."

Jia Bu replied, "If Headmaster Linghu doesn't accept these gifts, Shangguan Yun and I will be in big trouble." He slightly tilted his head towards Shangguan Yun and said, "Brother Shangguan, don't you think what I said was right?"

"It's right!" Shangguan Yun answered.

Linghu Chong was troubled. He thought, "Heng-Shan School is an orthodox school and we're like water and fire with your Devil Sect. It's already good that the two parties aren't fighting right now, but we still can't make friends with them. Also, Chief Ren and Yingying are going to settle their debt with Dongfang Bubai, so how can I accept their gifts?" He then said, "Brothers, please tell Mr. Dongfang that I don't dare to receive his gifts. If you didn't agree to take back these gifts then I'll send people to deliver these gifts back to your noble sect."

Jia Bu smiled slightly and said, "Headmaster Linghu, do you know what's in these forty boxes?"

"Of course I don't know."

Jia Bu laughed and replied, "Once Headmaster Linghu looked at it, you surely wouldn't refuse it. In these forty boxes, actually, they're not all gifts from Chief Dongfang. A portion of it actually belongs to Headmaster Linghu. We're just bringing them up to return these items to their original owner."

Linghu Chong was surprised. "My items? What could they be?"

Jia Bu took a big step forward and replied in a whisper, "The majority of these items were the items left behind by young lady Ren at Dark Wood Cliff, such as clothes, jewelleries, and other common things. Chief Dongfang told me to send them back for young lady Ren to use. And some of the other gifts are Chief's gifts to Hero Linghu and young lady Ren. Many of the items are mixed together so they can't be separated. Headmaster Linghu, there's no need to be polite. Haha, haha."

Linghu Chong's natural disposition was open-minded and carefree, and didn't confine himself to customs. Seeing that Dongfang Bubai had sent these gifts sincerely, and many of the

items also belonged to Yingying, he didn't refuse them anymore. He laughed loudly and said, "In that case, many thanks."

Just then, a female disciple came quickly towards him and reported, "Wudang School's Priest Chongxu has come to attend the ceremony."

Surprised, Linghu Chong quickly walked towards the entrance of the mountain peak to welcome Priest Chongxu who had come with eight of his disciples. Linghu Chong bowed to salute him. "Honorable Priest, Linghu Chong is deeply grateful."

Priest Chongxu smiled. "When Poor Priest heard of you becoming the Headmaster of Heng-Shan, I was really happy. Shaolin's Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng are also coming to congratulate you. Have they arrived yet?"

Linghu Chong was even more confounded. At this moment, there were a group of monks walking up towards the mountaintop. The two people walking in front had their sleeves floating around. They were Abbot Fangzheng and Great Master Fangsheng. Fangzheng called out, "Priest Chongxu, you walked really fast and arrived here before us."

Linghu Chong went down the mountain to welcome them. He called out, "Great Masters have come here personally, how is Linghu Chong worthy of this?"

Fangsheng laughed. "Young hero, you had entered Shaolin three times already, and yet this is just our first visit to you here at Heng-Shan. So it can be said that we're just respectfully visiting each other."

Linghu Chong welcomed the Shaolin's monks and Wudang's priests up the mountaintop. When the group of heroes on the mountaintop saw that Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders personally came, they were astonished and didn't dare to speak so loudly. All the Heng-Shan School's female disciples appeared pleased, and they all thought, "Martial brother Headmaster's reputation is so large."

Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun gave a glance and then turned a blind eye towards Fangzheng, Fangsheng, Chongxu, and the rest of their people.

Linghu Chong asked Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu to take a seat while he pondered, "I remembered when

Master became the leader of Huashan, the leaders of Shaolin School and Wudang School didn't personally come; they just sent their people. I was still young at that time and didn't know any of the guests, but when Master and Master-Wife talked about what was happening at that time, they never mentioned the presence of Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders. Today, they both arrived at the same time; did they really come here to congratulate me or do they have other intentions?"

A stream of people continued coming up the mountain. Most of them were the heroes who took part in attacking the Shaolin temple. Kunlun School, Diancang School, Emei School, Kongtong School, Beggar Clan, and all the other big clans sent representatives to congratulate and deliver the gifts. When Linghu Chong saw that the number of people who had come up to congratulate him was quite large, he felt relieved. "They've all come here because of Heng-Shan School and Dingxian Shi Tai's reputations. It's not because of Linghu Chong's reputation." Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan, and Taishan Schools didn't send anyone to congratulate him.

As the thunderous sound of firecrackers went off, marking the arrival of the auspicious hour, Linghu Chong stood in the middle of the field and bowed, saluting everyone around him. Then he said in a clear voice, "Heng-Shan School's former leader, Dingxian Shi Tai, sadly met with someone's plot, and together with Dingyi Shi Tai, she passed away. I, Linghu Chong, bear the last wish of Dingxian Shi Tai to take up the leadership of Heng-Shan School. Everyone in Heng-Shan School feels grateful for the presence of all the honourable seniors and friends here." Then, accompanied by the sound of cymbals, Heng-Shan School's disciples lined up in two rows, one after another. In the middle were four of the most senior disciples, Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhen, and Yizhi; each of them was holding a Buddhist relic. They walked up to Linghu Chong and bowed to him. Linghu Chong joined his two palms, returning the respect. Yihe said, "These four Buddhist relics were passed down by ancestor Xiaofeng Shi Tai during the inauguration of the Heng-Shan School. They are to be passed down to successive Headmasters. New Headmaster, martial brother Linghu, please receive these items."

"Yes," Linghu Chong responded.

The four disciples handed over each item accordingly. The items were a scroll of scripture, a wooden fish, a strand of prayer beads, and a dagger. When Linghu Chong saw the wooden fish and the prayer beads, he felt embarrassed. He extended his hands to receive them but both of his eyes were looking at the ground, afraid to look at the eyes of the people in the crowd. Yiqing unfolded the scroll and said, "Heng-Shan School's five commandments: The first commandment is to never disobey your superior, the second commandment is to never harm people in the same school, the third commandment is to never kill the innocents, the fourth commandment is to always be an upright person, and the fifth commandment is to never make friends with evil. These are the instructions left behind by the ancestor of the Heng-Shan School. Martial brother Headmaster must personally set an example and lead the disciples; these rules must be obeyed."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong responded. He thought in his heart, "The first three commandments are alright. But Linghu Chong isn't that upright, and this commandment "not to make friends with evil people" will be very hard to do. Today on this mountaintop, half of the guests here are people from the unorthodox path."

Suddenly he heard people coming up the mountain calling out, "Five Mountains Sword Schools' Chief Zuo has an order. Linghu Chong can't usurp the leadership of Heng-Shan School."

Amidst the clamour, five people rushed up followed by tens of people behind them. These first five people were each holding an embroidered flag, which were the alliance flags of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. They stopped tens of feet away from the crowd. Among those five people was a short and stout person, with a yellow chubby face, looking to be around fifty years old. Linghu Chong recognised that person as Yue Hou with the nickname 'Great Yin and Yang Palms'. He was a good fighter from the Songshan School. That day in the wilderness in Henan, Linghu Chong had fought with him and had pierced both of Yue Hou's palms with his long sword, and caused a deep hatred between them. But Yue Hou was a gentleman; On another day, he ambushed Linghu Chong and managed to defeat him but

instead of killing him, he jumped back to give Linghu Chong a chance to fight again. For this, Linghu Chong felt thankful towards Yue Hou<sup>39</sup>.

Linghu Chong immediately cupped his fist and said, "Senior Yue, you are well."

Yue Hou waved the command flag and bellowed, "Heng-Shan School is a member of the five mountains sword schools alliance so you must obey Chief Zuo's order."

"After Linghu Chong assumed the leadership of Heng-Shan School, we'll need to discuss whether we're still a part of the five mountains sword schools alliance or not," Linghu Chong replied.

By then, the remaining people had arrived on top of the mountain. They were disciples from Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan, and Taishan Schools. The eight disciples from Huashan were Linghu Chong's former martial brothers, but Lin Pingzhi wasn't among them. These people formed four rows and stood quietly while grasping the handle of their swords. Yue Hou said in a loud voice, "The school of Heng-Shan must be led by a Buddhist nun. Linghu Chong is a man. How can he violate the school rules that had stood for a hundred years at Heng-Shan?"

"Rules are made up by people, so they can also be changed by people. This is our own sect's internal matter and cannot be interfered with by outsiders," Linghu Chong responded.

From within the crowd, people started to scold Yue Hou, "This is their Heng-Shan School's matter. What's that got to do with your Songshan School?" "Your granny, quickly scram!" "What five mountains chief? Dog Chief, how shameless!"

Yue Hou said towards Linghu Chong, "What are these filthy people doing here?"

"All these brothers are my friends, they're here to attend the ceremony," Linghu Chong answered.

"Alright. Heng-Shan School has five major commandments. What's the fifth one?" Yue Hou asked.

Linghu Chong thought, "You're deliberately trying to put me down, so I'm going to debate this with you." He answered, "Of Heng-Shan School's five major commandments, the fifth one is never to make friends with evil. Linghu Chong definitely would never make friends with people like brother Yue."

When the crowd heard this, they erupted in laughter and shouted, "Evil disciples, quickly scram!" Yue Hou, along with the disciples from Songshan, Huashan, and the rest of the schools saw the situation, and each one of them thought that the enemies were plenty and they were few. If the enemies were to fight with them, then they would be in big trouble. Yue Hou then thought, "Martial brother Zuo has lost this time. He anticipated that we only have to deal with a bunch of nuns and young ladies, so the disciples from the four schools would be enough to take control of the situation. Even though Linghu Chong's sword art is good, we would be at an advantage when there's no sword in his hand. The five of us brothers could attack him now and we would certainly be able to kill him. Who would've thought that there would be so many guests up here, along with the leaders of Shaolin and Wudang Schools." He immediately turned his body towards Fangzheng and Chongxu and said, "Seniors, you are currently the two top masters in Wulin and people look up to you. Today, I ask you to please speak a few words here. Linghu Chong had gathered so many demons here at Heng-Shan; isn't this in violation of Heng-Shan School's commandment to never make friends with evil people? Heng-Shan School has lasted for so long and has enjoyed a grand reputation as an orthodox school. Everything would turn upside down in Linghu Chong's hand; are the two of you just going to sit there and do nothing?"

Fangzheng coughed before saying, "This... this... hmmm..." He thought that what this person said was reasonable. The majority of people present there were people from the unorthodox path, but how could he ask Linghu Chong to tell them all to go down the mountain?

Suddenly, coming up the mountain path, they heard a clear and crisp voice of a lady announcing, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's young lady Ren has arrived!"

Linghu Chong was happy and surprised at the same time. He couldn't stop himself from blurting out, "Yingying has come!" He hurriedly went towards the mountain side and saw two big men carrying a little green-coloured sedan chair quickly up the path. Behind the sedan chair followed four maids wearing green dresses.

When the people from the unorthodox path heard that Yingying had come, they rushed down the mountain to welcome her. They shouted their welcomes to her and crowded around the sedan chair as it came up to the peak.

When the sedan chair stopped, the curtain parted, and a girl wearing a pale green gown stepped out of it. It was really Yingying. The crowd cheered, "Sacred Lady! Sacred Lady!" and they all bowed towards her showing expressions of respect, admiration, and fear. The joy they showed was genuine and came from their hearts. Linghu Chong walked up a few steps and smiled. "Yingying, you've also come!"

Yingying returned his smile and said, "Today is your big day, how can I not come?" She then glanced across the crowd, walked a few steps, and gave her propriety towards Fangzheng and Chongxu. "Great Master Abbot, Headmaster Priest, I give you my respect."

Fangzheng and Chongxu returned her propriety, while they both thought in their hearts, "Linghu Chong and you are on good terms, but you shouldn't have come today. You're just making things more difficult for Linghu Chong."

Yue Hou said in a loud voice, "This lady in an important figure in the Devil Sect. Linghu Chong, what do you say to this?"

"What if she is?" Linghu Chong replied.

"Heng-Shan School's fifth major commandment stipulates that you must never make friends with evil. If you don't sever your relationship with these evil people, then you can't be the headmaster of Heng-Shan School."

"I won't be the headmaster then, what's so important about that?"

Yingying gave him a look; both of her eyes were full of affection. She thought, "Just for me, you'd forsake everything." She asked, "Headmaster Linghu, who is this person? Why did he come here asking about Heng-Shan School's matter?"

Linghu Chong answered, "He was sent here by Songsan School's Headmaster Zuo. In his hand is Headmaster Zuo's command flag. Let alone a small command flag, even if Headmaster Zuo had come personally, how can I just let him meddle in my Heng-Shan School's matter?"



Yingying nodded her head and agreed, "Right." Her thoughts went back to the fight that occurred in Shaolin temple where Zuo Lengchan gave them a lot of problem by using the Polar Ice Energy to heavily injure her father, and how her father came close to losing his life. She couldn't help feeling angry as she said, "Who said that this is Five Mountains Sword Schools' alliance flag? He's swindling people..." She had not finished her words when her body swayed and the flicker of a short sword was seen on her left hand as she stabbed it towards Yue Hou's chest.

Yue Hou had never expected that such a delicate and beautiful lady would attack so viciously. She didn't give any hint beforehand that she was going to attack and her attack was fast as lightning. As her sword stabbed out, it was too late for him to pull out his own sword, so he slanted his body avoiding the stab. But he didn't anticipate that Yingying's move was a false move, so as he slanted his body, the grip on his right hand loosened and his opponent snatched the embroidered flag. Yingying didn't stop there but stabbed four more times at four flag holders, which allowed her to snatch all five flags. She used the same exact move for all five moves. The other four Songshan School's disciples were all Yue Hou's martial brothers, and their bare hand martial arts were all good. Zuo Lengchan had dispatched them with the intention of making a surprise attack on Linghu Chong using their bare hands. But Yingying's attack was too quick, and in a moment, she had managed to snatch all the flags without them managing to attack back. Even though they had lost, it could be said that they were ambushed.

Yingying brought the flags over and turned around behind Linghu Chong's body. She said loudly, "Headmaster Linghu, these flags are fake. These aren't the five mountains sword schools' command flags. These are the Five Fairies Sect's five poison flags." She then furlled open the five flags and everyone understood. On the five flags were the drawings of five venomous pests: snake, centipede, spider, scorpion, and toad. The colours were bright and the pests looked alive. How could they be the five mountains sword schools' command flags?

Yue Hou and his group were stunned and didn't know what to say. Old Man, Zu Qianqiu and their group of heroes were cheering

loudly. Everyone knew that after Yingying snatched the command flags, she immediately hid them away and somehow exchanged them with the five poison flags. But her hand was actually too fast, and no one saw clearly how she did this.

Yingying called out, "Chief Blue!" A beautiful Miao girl walked out from the crowd and laughingly answered, "I'm here! What's Sacred Lady's order?" She was Blue Phoenix, the chief of the Five Fairies Sect. Yingying asked, "How did your five poison flags end up in Songshan School's hands?"

Blue Phoenix laughed and answered, "These Songshan School disciples are all good friends of my sect's female disciples. They must've uttered sweet words to swindle my sect's five poison flags."

"That's how it is. I'll return these five flags to you then," Yingying then tossed the five flags to her.

Blue Phoenix laughed and said, "Many thanks." She extended her hand and grabbed the flags.

Yue Hou was furious. He scolded, "Shameless witch, what kind of demonical methods are you using to deceive us? Quickly give us back the command flags."

Yingying smiled, "If you want the five poison flags, why don't you ask Chief Blue for them?"

Yue Hou didn't know what to do so he turned towards Fangzheng and Chongxu. "Great Master Abbot, Priest Chongxu, you are seniors of noble character and high prestige, please preside over this injustice."

Fangzheng stammered, "This... hmmm... never make friends with evil, Heng-Shan School certainly has this commandment, but... but... today, these friends from Jianghu are coming to attend the ceremony, so Headmaster Linghu can't just shut the door and turn them away, that's just too disrespectful..."

Yue Hou suddenly pointed to a person in the crowd and loudly shouted, "He... he... I recognise him as that rapist Tian Boguang! He's disguising himself as a monk. Are you trying to conceal yourself from my eyes? Are these kinds of people also Linghu Chong's friends?" Then in a fierce tone, he shouted, "Tian Boguang, what are you doing in Heng-Shan?"

"I came to pay my respect to Master," Tian Boguang replied.

Yue Hou was baffled, "Pay your respect to Master?"

"That's right." Tian Boguang then walked up to Yilin and kowtowed a few times. "Master, disciple pays his respect. Disciple is correcting my wrongs and my Buddhist name is called 'Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Yilin blushed and slightly moved away avoiding the kowtow. "You... you..."

Yingying smiled and said, "Master Tian is turning his heart away from the demonical and returning to the orthodox path, and had also taken a master; that's really good. He has also become a Buddhist with the name 'Cannot Have No Commandment'; this shows that he's sincere in his intention. Great Master Fangzheng, the correct way is to abandon the knife and join the Buddhist order. When a person is determined to correct his ways, then Buddha will give this person a new path to tread on, isn't this right?"

Fangzheng happily replied, "That right! Cannot Have No Commandment has joined the Heng-Shan School, and must strictly follow the school's rules from now on. This is really the good fortune of Wulin."

Yingying then said loudly, "Everyone heard it; we've all come here today to join the Heng-Shan School. If Headmaster Linghu is willing to accept us, then all of us will become the disciples of Heng-Shan School. How can Heng-Shan's disciples be regarded as evil?"

Suddenly, a flash of comprehension went through Linghu Chong. "So Yingying knew that I'd be embarrassed to be the headmaster of a group of female disciples. If there were a lot of male members in the school, then no one would be able to ridicule me. That's why she told all these people to join Heng-Shan School." He quickly asked in a clear voice, "Martial sister Yihe, is there any school rule that prohibit the school from accepting male disciples?"

Yihe replied, "There's no rule that prohibits accepting male disciples into the school, but... but..." Temporarily, she couldn't get her mind to work. She thought that it was inappropriate for so many male disciples to be suddenly in the school.

Linghu Chong said, "It's very good that everyone wants to join the Heng-Shan School. But there's no need to pay your respect. Heng-Shan School will arrange another... hmmm... a 'Heng-Shan Other Courtyard' for everybody to settle in. That Tong Yuan valley over there is a good place for that."

The Tong Yuan valley was situated besides the Xianxing Peak. According to the stories, during the Tang dynasty, Zhang Guolao meditated there to become a deity. There was also a big rock on Heng-Shan with a lot of donkey hoof marks on it, and the stories say these hoof marks were made by the donkey ridden by Zhang Guolao. These donkey's hoof marks were imprinted deeply in granite; if this were not done by a deity then how could it have been done? Emperor Tang Xuanzong gave the title of 'Mr. Tong Yuan' to Zhang Guolao. The name of Tong Yuan Valley was taken from this. Tong Yuan Valley was not far from Xianxing Peak, which was where the convent was located. But from the valley to the peak, the mountain path was dangerous. Linghu Chong arranged the living quarters for these Jianghu heroes at Tong Yuan Valley so that there would be separation between males and females so as to avoid slanders.

Fangzheng nodded his head and said, "That's very good. These friends are joining the Heng-Shan School and agreed to abide by Heng-Shan School's terms. This is really a joyful occasion in Wulin."

Yue Hou realised that his opponents had increased in numbers when he saw Great Master Fangzheng talking like this. It seemed that today he would not be able to stop Linghu Chong from becoming the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. So he proceeded to convey Zuo Lengchan's second task.

He coughed to gain attention and said in a clear voice, "Five Mountains Sword Schools Chief Zuo has an order: on the fifteenth of the third month, all five mountains sword schools must send their disciples to Songshan to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. Everyone must attend and must arrive on time."

Linghu Chong asked, "Whose idea is it to combine the five mountains sword schools into one?"

Yue Hou answered, "Songshan, Taishan, Huashan, and Hengshan Schools have all approved of this. If your Heng-Shan School objected to this, then you would be openly making things difficult for the other four schools, and you'll only be asking for trouble." He then turned around towards the Taishan School's disciples and asked, "Do you not think that this is the truth?" The tens of people standing behind him answered together, "That's right!"

Yue Hou laughed coldly and turned around to leave. After a few steps, he turned his head around to look at Yingying. He thought, "How do I get back those five command flags?"

Blue Phoenix laughed, "Teacher Yue, now that you've lost these flags, how can you return to Headmaster Zuo? It'd be better if I return it to you!" After she said this, she tossed a flag at him.

When Yue Hou saw the little flag flying towards him, he thought, "This is your Five Poison flag, not the Five Mountains command flag, why would I want it?" However, the flag had almost reached his throat so he quickly extended his hand to catch it. As soon as he caught it, he suddenly called out loudly and hastily dropped the flag. His palm felt like it was on fire. He turned his palm over to take a look and saw his palm had turned purple. He realized that there was poison on the pole of the flag and he had been trapped by the Five Fairies Sect. Feeling alarmed and angry, he angrily scolded, "Witch..."

Blue Phoenix laughingly said, "You call 'Headmaster Linghu' and ask for his help, then I'll give you the medicine. Otherwise, your whole palm would rot."

Yue Hou knew of the severity of the Five Fairies Sect's poison. In his hesitation, he felt his palm getting numb and losing feeling. His whole lifetime's martial art was in his two palms. If his two palms were to rot then he would become a cripple. This made him frightened with worries. He quickly called out, "Headmaster Linghu, you... "

Blue Phoenix laughed and interrupted him, "Ask for help."

"Headmaster Linghu, I offended you, I ask... ask you to please give me the med... medicine."

Linghu Chong smiled and replied, "Lady Blue, brother Yue was only doing what Headmaster Zuo ordered. Please give him the medicine."

Blue Phoenix laughed and waved her hand towards a Miao girl standing besides her. That Miao girl took a packet out from her bosom, walked forward a few steps, and tossed that packet to Yue Hou. Yue Hou grabbed the packet in a hurry and the crowd erupted in laughter. He quickly walked down the mountain followed by his people.

Linghu Chong announced in a clear voice, "Friends, since you all agreed to reside at Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard; you must all comply with the school's commandments. These commandments are actually not hard to follow, but the fifth commandment of never making friends with evils is a bit troublesome. But from today onwards, everyone has become Heng-Shan School member, and since Heng-Shan School's disciples are naturally not evil, you must take care in making friends when you're outside the school." The crowd boomed their acknowledgement.

Linghu Chong went on, "You can still drink wine and eat meat, but from now on, anyone who's not a vegetarian cannot come to the Xianxing Peak anymore."

Fangzheng cupped his hand and said, "Good, good! You must never desecrate the sacred ground of Buddha."

Linghu Chong laughed. "Alright, just regard that I've now become headmaster. Everyone's belly must be feeling hungry now, quickly get the vegetarian dishes out. I'll accompany Shaolin's Abbot, Wudang's Headmaster and all the other seniors in eating. I'll drink wine with everyone else tomorrow."

After they finished eating, Fangzheng said, "Headmaster Linghu, old monk and Chongxu have a few words to discuss with Headmaster."

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered. He thought in his heart, "The headmasters of the current top two schools in Wulin came to Heng-Shan today. They certainly have something important to say. With dragons and snakes mixing together on top of Xianxiang Peak, no matter where we speak, it's unavoidable that walls will have ears."

He immediately ordered Yihe, Yiqing and the other disciples to entertain the guests. Then he turned towards Fangzheng and Chongxu and said, "Down at the back of this mountain, there's a mountain besides the Porcelain Oven Pass which is called Mount Cui Ping. This mountain has a mirror-like cliff and on top of it, there's a Hanging Temple. This is the panorama unique to Heng-Shan. If the two seniors are interested, please allow Junior to lead you there."

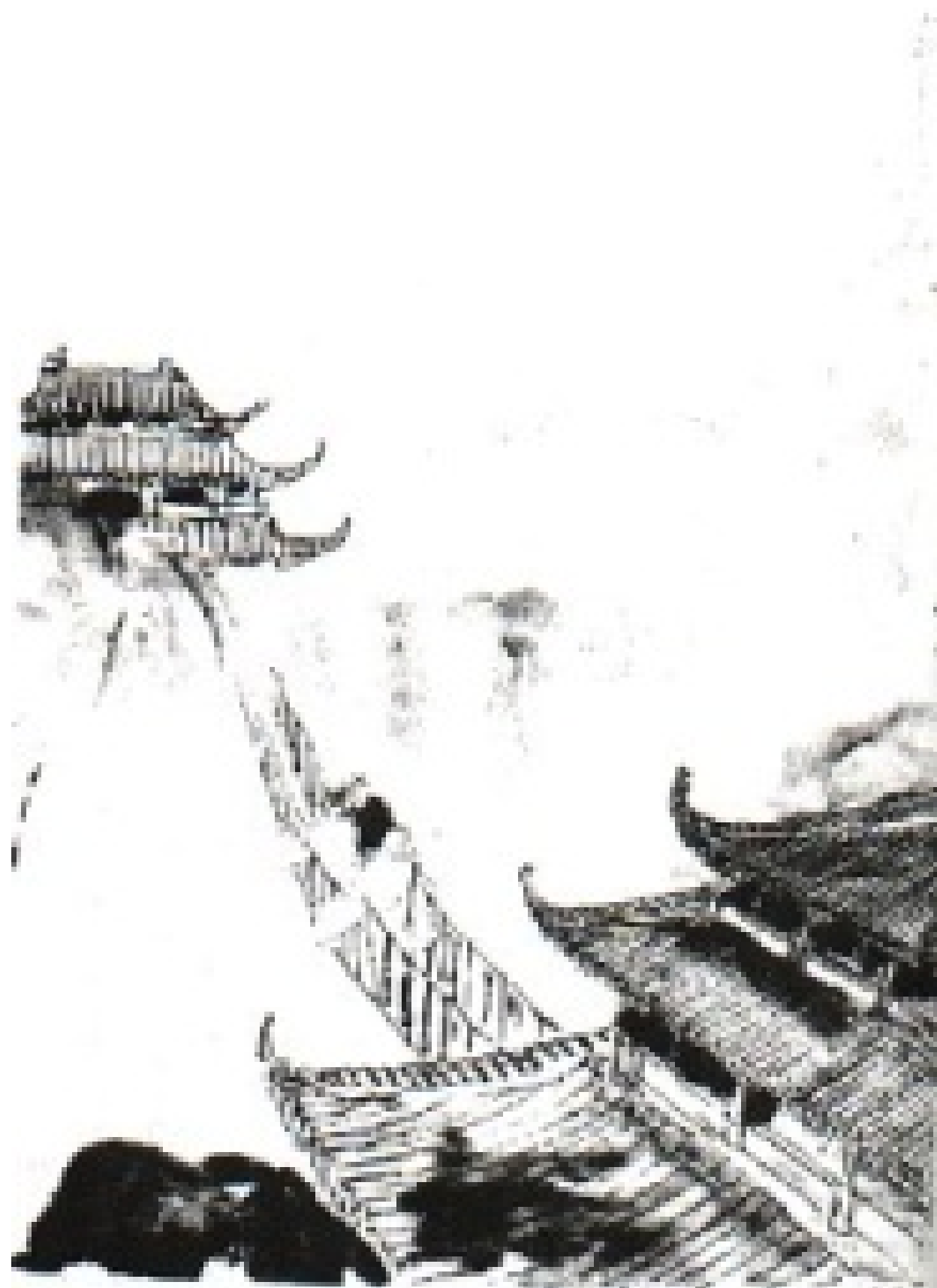
Priest Chongxu happily answered, "I've long heard that the Hanging Temple on Mount Cui Ping was built around the Northern Song dynasty. Pines trees can't grow there and not even monkeys can climb up there. Someone had really exerted a lot of effort in building a temple in the clouds. That's really a marvel in this world; I've admired it for a long time already and would really like to see it."

# **Chapter 30: Secret Meeting**

**Translated by: Pokit and Bliss**

**Edited by: Hhaung**





**Linghu Chong, Fangzheng and Chongxu walked onto the suspension bridge. The bridge was only several feet wide. When one walked on the bridge, looked at the emptiness in all direction, and enjoyed the clouds flowing by under, it almost seemed to be in heaven. In such a wonderful spot, all three enjoyed the ease of mind!**

Linghu Chong led Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu down Xianxing Peak. They hastened through Porcelain Oven Pass, and arrived under Mount Cui Ping. Fangzheng and Chongxu looked up and saw two pavilions on top of the mountain. The pavilions looked as if they were constructed by deities as their rooftops pierced through the cloud. Fangzheng sighed and commented, "The person who built this pavilion really had lofty imagination. For a person with high aspirations, nothing in the world is difficult." The three people slowly climbed up the mountain and finally arrived at the Hanging Temple. The Hanging Temple had two pavilions; each three stories high and soaring hundreds of feet above the ground. The two pavilions were separated from each other by a distance of tens of steps away and were connected by a sky bridge on the second floor.

Inside the temple was an old servant woman sweeping the floor. When she saw Linghu Chong, Abbot Fangzheng, and Priest Chongxu, she just stared at them, not greeting or saluting them. More than ten days ago, Linghu Chong had come here with Yihe, Yiqing, Yilin and the rest of the disciples, so he knew that this servant was deaf and mute, and that she also did not seem to understand anything nor pay attention to anyone. He proceeded to the sky bridge with Fangzheng and Chongxu in tow. The sky bridge was only a few feet wide. If ordinary people were to ascend the bridge to view the scenery from up there, they would see the empty space all around them with cloud filling their view, and they would feel as if they were standing in the sky and it would be unavoidable that they would start to shake and feel as if their

limbs had turned into jelly. But these three people were first class masters, so they were not daunted and their minds were at ease.

Fangzheng and Chongxu gazed at a hazy cloud in the north and they were able to faintly see the outline of a city wall. There was also water flowing through the two cliffs of Porcelain Oven Pass. The view was really majestic.

“The ancient people said that one man guarding the pass would stop ten thousand people from passing through. The terrain here really suits this saying,” Fangzheng said.

“During the years of the Northern Song, Yang Lao ordered Gong E to guard three passes and he made his base here. This place is strategically placed and would suit any war tactician. From the moment I saw the Hanging Temple, I feel that the building is grand and I admire the perseverance of people in the old days. But the Hanging Temple became insignificant when you compared it to this five hundred li of chiselled mountain path.”

Linghu Chong was surprised, “Priest, you’re saying that this several hundred li of mountain path was also man made?”

“The history book says that Emperor Wei Daowu placed his soldiers here from Mount Zhong to Pingzheng during his first year of reign, and ordered tens of thousands of soldiers to dig out the Heng mountain range to make the five hundred li mountain path. Porcelain Oven Pass is at the end of this road,” Chongxu answered.

Fangzheng said, “Even though it is called five hundred li straight road, the majority of it was actually nature made. Northern Song’s Emperor Wei sent out tens of thousands of soldiers only to open a pass through this mountain. But even so, the project was really large and it was shocking for most people.”

“No wonder that so many people want to become an emperor. He only has to open his mouth and say a few words,

and tens of thousands of soldiers immediately chiselled out a mountain pass for him,” Linghu Chong said.

“In those ancient times, there were many bold and outstanding heroes. And with this kind of power and influence to aspire to, you can imagine how difficult things were. But you don’t need to mention about emperors, there’s already a lot of disturbances and continuous fighting in the current Wulin even without ‘power and influence’ coming into play,” Chongxu told him.

Linghu Chong felt a shiver in his heart as he thought, “He’s come to the topic he wants to discuss.” He asked, “Junior doesn’t understand. Two seniors, please give me some advice.”

“Headmaster Linghu, today, Songshan School’s old Yue led a lot of people to come here. What do you think it was for?” Fangzheng asked.

Linghu Chong answered, “He was conveying Chief Zuo’s order to not allow junior to take over the leadership of Heng-Shan School.”

“Why is Chief Zuo not willing to allow you to become the headmaster of Heng-Shan School?”

“Chief Zuo wants to combine the five mountains sword schools into one, and Junior has repeatedly thwarted his plan and has also killed many Songshan School people. So Chief Zuo abhors junior completely.”

Fangzheng asked, “Why do you want to thwart his plan?”

Linghu Chong was stupefied and found it hard to answer. He repeatedly mumbled, “Why do I want to thwart his plan?”

Fangzheng asked, “Do you believe that combining the five mountains sword schools into one is inappropriate?”

“At that time, junior didn’t think whether it’s appropriate or not. But in order to force Heng-Shan School to agree, Songshan School disguised themselves as the Sun Moon Sect, captured the disciples of Heng-Shan, and besieged Dingjing Shi Tai. And they use contemptible methods in doing these. Junior coincidentally met these matters and felt

that they were wrong, so I helped Heng-Shan. Later on, Songshan School wanted to burn Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai in the Sword-forging Valley; this was even more despicable. Junior have thought this over. If merging the five mountains sword schools was a good thing, then why doesn't Songshan School discuss this clearly and openly with each school's headmaster instead of doing all these sly and evil things?"

Chongxu nodded his head before saying, "Headmaster Linghu's view isn't wrong. Zuo Lengchan's wild ambition is enormous and he wants to become the number one person in Wulin. He himself knows that it's difficult to subdue a lot of people so he's forced to plot secretly."

Fangzheng sighed before adding, "Chief Zuo is cultured in the military arts and is also an illustrious person in Wulin. And within the five mountains sword school, there's originally no one who can compare to him. But his ambition is too enormous, and he also wishes to overwhelm the two schools of Wudang and Shaolin in a hurry. So it's unavoidable that he would use some unscrupulous methods to achieve this."

Chongxu said, "Shaolin School is publicly accepted as the leader of Wulin. Wudang is on the same level as Shaolin. Kunlun, Emei, and Kongtong Schools are at the next level. Brother Linghu, each of these schools was founded several hundred years ago by numerous heroes who had spent countless sweat and blood in establishing their schools. Every set of their martial arts, every little detail has been refined in those hundreds of years; this isn't just the result from a single day of work. The five mountains sword schools alliance had only established themselves in Wulin within the last seventy to eighty years. Even though they had flourished quickly, their martial arts still aren't as good as Kunlun or Emei, let alone Shaolin School's profound seventy two unique arts." Linghu Chong nodded his head in affirmation.

Chongxu continued, "Within each school, there has also been one or two talented master with powerful martial arts.

It's common in Wulin that an outstanding master's reputation would be known everywhere. But it would be unprecedented if this reputation were earned solely on strength alone by taking control of all the schools in the realm. Zuo Lengchan is full of wild ambition, and this is precisely what he wants to do. When he became the chief of the five mountains sword schools alliance, Great Master Abbot anticipated that things in Wulin would be eventful from then on. In the past few years, Zuo Lengchan has acted exactly as Great Master Abbot predicted."

Fangzheng let out a prayer, "Amitufo."

Chongxu went on, "It was only Zuo Lengchan's first step when he became chief of the five mountains sword schools alliance. His second step is to merge the five mountains schools into one and install himself as the headmaster. After merging the five schools, he would have a lot of manpower and would become an equal with Shaolin and Wudang Schools. Then, as a third step, he'll absorb Kunlun, Emei, Kongtong, and Qingcheng Schools. Then he's certain to declare war on Devil Sect and lead Shaolin and Wudang Schools in attacking the Devil Sect. This would be the fourth step."

Linghu Chong felt fear in his heart as he heard this. "This ambitious plan is really hard to execute and Zuo Lengchan's martial art isn't necessarily unbeatable in this world. How did he come by such an ambitious plan?"

Chongxu answered, "A person's heart is difficult to predict. No matter how difficult a worldly matter is, there's always someone who would want to try it out. Have a look, wasn't this five hundred li mountain path man-made? Wasn't this Hanging Temple built by someone? If Zuo Lengchan manage to destroy the Devil Sect then he'll be the best in Wulin, and next he would want to annex Wudang and clean up Shaolin. This could possibly happen. And of course he doesn't need to rely only on his martial art to do all of these things."

Fangzheng let out another prayer, "Amitufo!"

"Right now, Zuo Lengchan wants all the Wulin's warriors in the realm to be under his command," Linghu Chong said.

"That's right! After that, I'm afraid he'll want to become the emperor. After he's become the emperor, then he would want to have a long life. May you attain boundless longevity! This is called 'Human's greed is like a snake trying to swallow an elephant'. It's been like that since the ancient times. Of all the heroes in this world, there's not many who can escape the trap of 'power and influence'," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong was silent. He couldn't help from shivering as the cold northern wind swept through. "We humans only live for dozens of years, and the most important thing in life is to be happy. Why do you have to attain power, influence, and all that? Zuo Lengchan wants to exterminate Kongtong and Kunlun, and annex Shaolin and Wudang. How many people would he kill? How much blood would be shed?"

Chongxu clapped and said, "That's right, the three of us have this heavy responsibility to prevent Zuo Lengchan from succeeding in order to avoid a bloodbath."

Linghu Chong became alarmed. "Priest is making junior terrified by speaking like that. Junior's knowledge is shallow; I will listen to seniors' plan."

"That day when you led so many heroes to go to Shaolin to meet young lady Ren, you didn't damage a single grass or tree in Shaolin temple. Great Master Abbot received your compassion on that day," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong's face turned scarlet. "I'm afraid Junior had really made a big disturbance."

Chongxu went on, "After you went away, Zuo Lengchan and the others also left one by one while I stayed on at Shaolin temple for seven days to have many long talks with Great Master Abbot. We talked deeply about our worries regarding Zuo Lengchan's wild ambition. That day, just as Ren Woxing used deceit to gain the upper hand on Great Master Fangzheng, Zuo Lengchan also used deceit to subdue

Ren Woxing. Originally, this would not have been a big deal, but those ignorant disciples in Wulin would say: 'Great Master Fangzheng isn't Ren Woxing's match, while Ren Woxing isn't Zuo Lengchan's match...'

Linghu Chong continuously shook his head and disagreed, "Not likely, not likely!"

"We all know that it's unlikely. But Zuo Lengchan's reputation is likely to increase greatly because of this fight, and he will become even more conceited and his wild ambition will grow even more. Later on, we separately received news of Brother becoming the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. We both decided to personally come to Heng-Shan to attend the ceremony to give our congratulations and to discuss about

this big matter," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong said, "Junior doesn't deserve all the favours that seniors have shown me."

"That Yue Hou came to convey Zuo Lengchan's order. He said that on the fifteenth of the third month, everyone from the five mountains sword schools would gather at Songshan to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. This act has long been predicted by Great Master Abbot, but we never thought that he would do this so soon. When he said that it was to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, he made it sound as if the merging of the five mountains sword schools were a sure thing. Actually, Hengshan's Mr. Mo Da's temperament is peculiar and it's unlikely that he would be attached to Zuo Lengchan. Taishan's Priest Tianmen is very firm and he also would never bend to other people's wishes. Your master Mr. Yue looks relaxed on the outside but he's actually very serious on the inside and very strict about preserving the tradition of Huashan School. Mr. Yue would definitely fight against Zuo Lengchan seeing that Zuo Lengchan would wipe out the reputation of Huashan School. This leaves Heng-Shan School. The three senior Shi Tai have all passed away and this left the



female disciples powerless to fight against Zuo Lengchan and therefore they probably would've surrendered. Who would've thought that Dingxian Shi Tai would break with custom and hand the headmaster position into Brother's hand. Brother Great Master Abbot and I have talked about Dingxian Shi Tai's foresight, and we really admire her. It was all the more difficult for her to think about this especially when she was already injured heavily. But she still managed to think it through. This shows just how much Dingxian Shi Tai had trained herself that even as she was a breath away from dying, she still had a clear mind. If Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, and Heng-Shan Schools ally together and do not permit the forming of this Five Mountains School, only then would Zuo Lengchan's plot be foiled," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong said, "But judging from the tone of voice Yue Hou used when he gave that order today, it seems that Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are already under Zuo Lengchan's control."

Chongxu nodded and said, "Yes. Lately, when we think of your master Mr. Yue, Great Master Abbot and I have become really confused. We heard that Fuzhou's Lin Family has a son who has taken your master as his master, is this right?"

"Yes. This martial brother Lin's name is Lin Pingzhi," Linghu Chong answered.

"His great grandfather has passed down a book called the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. This rumour has been going around in Jianghu for a very long time. Everyone said that this book contains a very powerful sword art. Brother must surely have heard of this," Chongxu said.

"I have," Linghu Chong answered. Then he immediately told them of the search for the Buddhist robe in Fuzhou's Xiangyang Lane, how Songshan School sent people to snatch it, and how he himself got injured.

Chongxu hummed deeply after listening to his story. He then said, "It is reasonable to suppose that your master found

this Buddhist robe on you and gave it to your martial brother Lin."

"Yes. But later on, martial sister chased me and asked for this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. I find this problem really hard to solve and as Junior has already been wrongly blamed for this for a long time, I didn't pay further attention to this problem. But what's really the truth behind this Evil Resisting Sword Art, could seniors please tell me?"

Chongxu looked at Fangzheng and said, "Great Master Abbot, please tell Brother Linghu the whole story."

Fangzheng nodded his head a few times before saying, "Headmaster Linghu, have you heard of the name 'Sunflower Manual'?"

"I've heard Junior's master mentioned it before. He said 'Sunflower Manual' is a secret which contained a supreme martial art study, but it has been lost for a long time and no one knows of its whereabouts. Later on, Junior heard Chief Ren saying that he passed this 'Sunflower Manual' down to Dongfang Bubai. So this item 'Sunflower Manual' is currently in the hands of Sun Moon Sect."

Fangzheng shook his head and said, "The book Sun Moon Sect has is incomplete and isn't the original."

"Yes," Linghu Chong responded. He felt that if these two seniors didn't know of this secret in Wulin then no one else would know of it. He also felt that Great Master Fangzheng was on the verge of revealing this really big secret.

Fangzheng lifted his head and longingly looked at the floating white clouds. "During the days that Huashan School was separated into two, the Qi faction and the Sword faction, Huashan School's seniors were killing each other because of this division. Do you also know about this?"

"Yes. But my master didn't talk about this in detail," Linghu Chong answered.

Fangzheng nodded. "Internal fighting in the school is really not a good thing so Mr. Yue didn't want to talk too much about it. The reason why Huashan School was divided

into Qi faction and Sword faction was said to be because of this 'Sunflower Manual'." He paused for a time before slowly continuing, "For a long time in Wulin, it has been said that this 'Sunflower Manual' originated from the previous dynasty, created by an official of the Imperial Court."

"A government official?" Linghu Chong asked.

Fang Zheng went on, "The government official was a eunuch. The name of this master is forever lost. In addition, just why exactly such a highly skilled master became a eunuch in the imperial court will never be known to us now. What we do know is that the martial arts inscribed in that manual are deep and profound to the extreme. For the past 300 some odd years, no one person has been able to take possession of the manual and master its arts. About a hundred years ago, the manual came into the possession of the Putian Shaolin Temple. At that time, the abbot of that Shaolin temple was Reverend Hongxie. He was an extremely wise and intelligent person, which was reflected in his vast understanding of martial arts. Reverend Hongxie was the perfect candidate who possessed enough talent to master the Manual's profound martial arts. But it has been claimed by Reverend Hongxie's students that their master never mastered the Sunflower Manual. Moreover, they have even said that after studying it for quite some time, Reverend Hongxie never even began to practice it at all."

Linghu Chong reasoned, "It must be because there was some secret part of the Manual that was missing, that even such a talent like Reverend Hongxie wasn't able to fully comprehend the Sunflower Manual without it."

Fang Zheng nodded and answered, "That might be a possibility. However, the Old Taoist and I have never had the fortune of encountering this Manual. Not saying that we would dare to practice its arts, but perhaps seeing what kind of profound and mystical writings are in it would be interesting."

Chong Xu smiled slightly and said, "Great Master, you are being affected by worldly desires. We are practitioners of the martial arts. Because we haven't had the chance to see the Manual we can say we won't practice. But if we actually did get to see it, most likely we would be losing sleep and not eating, tirelessly studying the Manual's words and meaning. The result would be that not only would we mistakenly waste our cultivation, but it would lead our mind to endless troubles and confusion. Because we haven't had the fortune to have seen the Manual, I would say that we are the ones who are truly fortunate."

Fang Zheng laughed. "Old Taoist you are right. Old monk is still not free of worldly longings. How shameful it is." He then turned his head back around to Linghu Chong and continued, "Huashan School had two martial brothers who happened to be visiting the Shaolin Temple at that time and they caught sight of the Sunflower Manual there."

Linghu Chong thought, "Because the manual was so important, Shaolin must have taken measures not to allow anyone to see the Manual. Those two martial brothers of Huashan must have secretly peeped at the Manual."

Fang Zheng continued, "Because of the urgency of the situation, those two brothers couldn't spend time to study the Manual in depth during their stay at Shaolin. So the two divided up the work and each read and memorized half of the Sunflower Manual. Afterwards, they returned to Huashan and together studied and discussed each part that they read. But what happened was that the two martial brothers disagreed on a lot of what was written in the Manual. When they tried putting their parts together, a lot of it did not make sense. Each believed what he read and memorized was correct, what he interpreted was correct, and the other person was mistaken. However, from the individual parts that each of them had memorized, neither one could come up with or practice anything substantial either. The two brothers used to be very close and were the best of friends. However

after this clash of interests, they became very heated rivals and this was the cause of the split of Huashan into Qi and Sword factions."

Linghu Chong added, "Those two senior martial brothers, are they Huashan School's seniors Yue Su and Cai Zifeng?" Yue Su was the founder of Huashan's Qi branch and Cai Zifeng was the founder of Huashan's Sword branch. The splitting of the two sects of Huashan was a thing of the distant past.

Fang Zheng went on with his story, "Yes. The incident with Yue and Cai was soon discovered by Reverend Hongxie. He understood that although the martial arts philosophies inside the Sunflower Manual were profound and deep, they were also brutal, ferocious and dangerous. He stated that the first step was the most difficult step in learning the arts of the Sunflower Manual. After the first step, learning the rest was relatively simple. All the martial arts in this world are relatively easy to learn in the beginning and get increasingly difficult as one progresses further. The Sunflower Manual was the exact opposite. The first step was extremely difficult and if even a small mistake was made when training, if one didn't die from it one would certainly be severely injured. So therefore he sent his disciple Reverend Duyuan to try to convince the two Huashan brothers to stop trying to practice the Sunflower Manual as it could be extremely harmful to them."

Linghu Chong said, "This martial art was unexpectedly very hard to learn in the beginning. If no one gave you any direction, and you only learn from the book, then of course it would be very dangerous. But could it be that the two Huashan martial brothers didn't listen to his advice?"

Fang Zheng answered, "That wasn't the case. That would be wrongly blaming the two of them. Looking at a person like me who's been practicing martial art for my whole lifetime, if one day I had the chance to take a peek at a deep and

profound martial art's secret, how could I not be willing to study it? Old monk has cultivated my study

in Buddhism for tens of years, but if one day I managed to get my hands on the Manual, I would definitely still read it. Priest Chongxu laughed at this earlier. So how can a secular martial art master refuse it? Unexpectedly, this was exactly what happened to Reverend Duyuan when he went up to see them."

Linghu Chong asked, "Could it be that the two Huashan brothers had ill intentions toward Reverend Duyuan when he tried to coerce them into giving up the Manual?"

Fangzheng shook his head. "That wasn't the case. They were actually very courteous to Reverend Duyuan and admitted that they had actually looked at the 'Sunflower Manual'. On the one hand, they apologized and on the other hand, they asked for Duyuan's advice on the writings of the Manual. But they never expected that even though Reverend Duyuan was Reverend Hongxie's precious disciple, he had never once before heard or encountered the Manual at all. Because Hongxie himself never

really understood the writings of the Manual so he couldn't teach it to his disciple. But the two brothers, Yue and Cai, were certain that Reverend Duyuan was proficient in the martial arts study of the Manual, so they wanted to get his opinion on it. At the time, Duyuan didn't really understand the verses from the Manual that they recited to him either. He just casually explained the writings as they recited, and couldn't help but secretly memorize what they recited. Reverend Duyuan was also an exceptional martial arts master as well as an extremely wise and intelligent person. Through his logical deductions of what the two brothers recited, the explanations he gave actually fit and made sense."

Linghu Chong said, "So it turns out that Reverend Duyuan was learning the script of the Manual from two brothers as they recited it."

Fang Zheng nodded his head. "Correct. But originally, what the two brothers recited was not very much. But after hearing how the explanations Reverend Duyuan gave them made sense, they couldn't resist the temptation and invited him to stay at Huashan for 8 more days. But after this visit, Duyuan never returned to the Shaolin temple."

Linghu Chong was surprised, "Never returned? Where did he go afterwards?"

Fang Zheng replied, "At that time, no one knew. But not long afterwards, Reverend Hongxie received a letter from Reverend Duyuan stating that his attachments to the world were too great that he decided to leave the Buddhist realm and renounce his monkhood. He was also very ashamed and couldn't face his master anymore." Linghu Chong felt that this was very strange and that there must be another reason for this.

Fangzheng continued, "After that incident, there was much suspicion and distrust between Shaolin and Huashan. The news that Huashan disciples had secretly studied the Sunflower Manual leaked to the public and soon after, the ten elders of the Devil Sect attacked Huashan." Just then, Linghu Chong remembered the bones and skulls inside the cave behind the Cliff of Contemplation. He also recalled the engravings of the various sword arts on the cave wall and couldn't help from uttering an 'ah' in acknowledging his comprehension.

"What is it?" Fangzheng asked.

Linghu Chong's face turned red and said, "I've interrupted Abbot's story, please forgive me."

Fangzheng nodded his head and continued, "This incident happened before your master was even born. The Elders of the Devil Sect attacked Huashan with the intention of stealing the Sunflower Manual. It was because of this incident that Taishan, Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan and Hengshan formed an alliance. After receiving word, the other

four schools came to Huashan's aid. A bloody battle occurred on Huashan, and all ten of the Devil Sect Elders were badly wounded. Yue and Cai also lost their lives in this battle and as a result, the version of the Manual that they penned was snatched away by the Devil Sect. That's why it's hard to say who had actually won this battle. Five years later, the Devil Sect returned to attack, but this time the ten elders came prepared. They had managed to understand the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools comprehensively and thought up counter moves to break all the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools. Priest Chongxu and old monk believe that even though the martial arts of the Ten Elders were great already, to be able to comprehend and counter all the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools, the Sunflower Manual must have played some role in giving them such insights into martial arts theories. At this second battle, the five mountains schools actually suffered great losses. Many great masters lost their lives and since that day many of the intricate and complex sword arts of those schools were lost as well. However, those ten Devil Sect elders were also unable to escape Huashan. Thinking of the fighting that happened at that time, it must've been ferocious and bloody."

Linghu Chong said, "Junior saw the remains of these ten Devil Sect's elders inside a cave in Huashan's Cliff of Contemplation, and I also saw a number of inscriptions engraved on the stone wall."

"Did you? What was written on the wall?" Chongxu asked.

"The inscription was written in big letters and it says: 'THE FIVE MOUNTAINS SWORD ALLIANCE, YOU SHAMELESS AND DESPICABLE BUNCH, CAN'T

WIN IN A FAIR FIGHT, DIRTY TRICKS ARE YOUR SPECIALTY'. Besides it were more sentences written in small letters cursing and swearing at the five mountains sword schools, like shameless, etc, etc," Linghu Chong told them.



"How could Huashan School let these slanders remain on the stone wall? This is really strange," Chongxu pondered.

"Junior discovered this stone cave accidentally, and no one else knows of its existence," Linghu Chong explained. He then immediately told them how he discovered this stone cave, and he also told them how someone with an axe had dug several hundred feet through the mountain, but this person had died from exhaustion inches away from breaking through.

Great Master Fangzheng asked, "Using an axe? Could it be that he was 'Divine Strength Demon' Fan Song?"

"He was! There was a sentence on the wall that says: 'Fan Song and Zhao He defeat Heng-Shan sword art here'."

"Zhao He? He's one of the ten elders called 'Divine Flying Demon'. Was he using a thunder mace?" Fangzheng asked.

"Junior doesn't know about this, but on the ground of the cave, there was a thunder mace there. Junior remembered the inscription on the stone wall, the ones who defeated the Huashan School's sword art were called Zhang Chengfeng and Zhang Chengyun."

"It's true then, they are the two brothers 'Divine Golden Monkey Demon' Zhang Chengfeng and 'Divine White Ape Demon' Zhang Chengyun. It was said that their weapons were copper cudgels," Fangzheng said.

"That's right. The pictures on the stone wall showed cudgels defeating my Huashan School's sword art. It was really wonderful and unthinkable."

"That place you saw is apparently the trap that the five mountains sword schools had prepared to capture those ten elders from the Devil Sect. Once they were trapped in that mountain cave, they were locked up and were unable to get out," Fangzheng deduced.

"Junior also has the same thought. That's why those people thought that they had been treated unfairly and wrote those swear words on the stone wall and touted that they had defeated all the sword arts of the five mountains

sword schools. They wanted to let people know in the future that they hadn't been defeated in a fight but had been trapped instead. There were also some Huashan School's sword arts engraved on the stone wall, they were extremely wonderful and it seems that even my master and master-wife don't know about them. Junior doesn't know the reason for this but now that I've heard Great Master Abbot relating the past story, it's certain that these high sword arts were lost after most of Huashan School's seniors lost their lives there. Heng-Shan, Taishan, and the other schools seemed to have lost their

high sword arts as well since then."

"That's right," Chongxu affirmed.

"There were also some long swords that belonged to the five mountains sword schools besides the bones of the Devil Sect's ten elders," Linghu Chong added.

Fangzheng let out an unusual expression and said, "I don't know the reason. Maybe the ten elders snatched them from the hands of the five mountains sword schools people. Have you talked to anyone about what you saw in that cave?"

"After Junior discovered that cave, I've been going from one misfortune to the next and haven't had any time to mention this to master and master-wife. But grand martial uncle Feng knows about it already," Linghu Chong said.

Fangzheng nodded his head. "My younger martial brother Fangsheng once had the opportunity to meet senior Feng and received his favour. Martial brother Fangsheng told me that your sword technique was taught by senior Feng. We know that during the time when Huashan split into two branches, senior Feng had already decided to leave Huashan to be on his own."

Chong Xu said, "It was said in Wulin that during the time when Huashan split into two and were fighting amongst themselves, senior Feng was away in Jiangnan getting married. When he heard news of the fighting, he quickly

returned to Huashan but the Sword faction had already lost with numerous casualties on their side. Otherwise with his wonderful sword art in the fight, the Qi faction would never have gotten the upper hand. Senior Feng felt immediately that the Jiangnan's family that his wife was supposed to be from might be a hoax. Actually, that guy Yue Zhang had secretly received instruction from the Huashan's Qi faction to hire a prostitute and tell her to pretend to be a lady from an esteemed background looking to be married so that they can restrain Senior Feng in Jiangnan. Senior Feng then went back to Jiangnan to look for that Yue's family he was to marry, but everyone was missing. He realized then that he had been tricked. Rumor has it that Senior Feng was so extremely angry that he cut off his own head."

Fangzheng's expression changed as he looked at Chongxu wanting him to stop talking. But Chongxu pretended not to understand and the last thing he said was, "Headmaster Linghu, poor Taoist respects senior Feng completely and would never dare to talk about his private life. So I told you about this matter today so that you understand that heroes get into trouble because of women. When a gentleman makes a mistake, it's not such a big deal, but they can't keep falling deeper and deeper into that mistake."

Linghu Chong knew that he was using the analogy to talk about Yingying. But knowing that Priest Chongxu had said this with good intentions, Linghu Chong just sighed and did not answer. He thought, "Grand martial uncle Feng has been living at the Cliff of Contemplation for all these years. So he really regrets about his past and he's too ashamed to see people of the orthodox path in Wulin. That's why he told me not to tell anyone of his whereabouts and he also said that from then on he doesn't want to see anyone from the Huashan School anymore. A grievous misfortune befell on him and for these past tens of years, he has been living by himself. After I've settled this big matter, I'll go up Cliff of

Contemplation to talk to him for a while. Now that I'm no longer a member of the Huashan School, paying him a visit wouldn't be considered violating his order."

The three people talked for half a day until the sun was going down the mountain, painting a crimson colour across the horizon. Fangzheng said, "Not long after Huashan School's Yue Su and Cai Zifeng wrote down the 'Sunflower Manual', they were killed by the Devil Sect's ten elders so they didn't have time to practise it yet and the Manual was taken by the Devil Sect. That's why no one in Huashan School had managed to learn any martial art from the Manual. But Yue and Cai had perceived the Manual differently; one said the study of qi was more important while the other gave more importance to the study of sword. They had separately convinced the school's disciples with their own viewpoints and this later resulted in the division of Huashan School into two branches - Qi and Sword. This division caused the disciples from the two branches to fight amongst themselves within the school. This Manual really is a very inauspicious item."

Chongxu nodded his head. "The five colours blind people, the five tones deafen people, that's the theory."

Fangzheng said, "Even though the Devil Sect managed to get the partially completed Manual written by these two brothers, perhaps it has no benefit at all. The ten elders perished on Huashan because of this. Headmaster Linghu said before that Chief Ren passed the Manual down to Dongfang Bubai. Perhaps the hatred between these two people was also caused by this Manual. In actuality, this incomplete manual is probably not even as good as the one memorised by Lin Yuantu."

Linghu Chong asked, "Who's Lin Yuantu?"

"En, Lin Yuantu was your martial brother Lin's great grandfather, the founder of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, the one who used the seventy-two stances of Evil

Resisting Sword Art to shake the world; that was him," Fangzheng answered.

"This senior Lin, did he also see the 'Sunflower Manual' before?" Linghu Chong inquired.

"He was Reverend Duyuan, the disciple of Reverend Hongxie!" Fangzheng explained.

Linghu Chong was shaken when he heard this. "So that's what happened."

"Reverend Duyuan originally had the surname Lin, so when he went back to the secular world, he retook his original surname," Fangzheng said.

"So Senior Lin was Reverend Duyuan, and he was also the same person who shook Jianghu with the seventy-two stances of Evil Resisting Sword Art. This is really unexpected," Linghu Chong mumbled. Suddenly, sadness swelled over him as he remembered how Lin Zhennan died on that night in the worn-out temple outside Hengshan city.

"Duyuan is 'Tu Yuan'. After this Senior Reverend went back to the secular world, he reverted back to his original surname but he inverted his Buddhist name and took the name Yuantu. He got married, founded the escort house, and caused a big uproar in Jianghu. This Senior Lin was an upright person. Even though he was running an escort house, his conduct was still heroic and righteous, and he was still eager to help people in distress. He was no longer a Buddhist monk but he was still acting like a Buddhist. One only has to have a good heart to be a Buddhist; not much difference exists between such a person and a Buddhist. Of course, not long after that Reverend Hongxie heard about these events and realised that the head of the Lin escort house was his most loved disciple. But he never paid him a visit." Fangzheng told him.

"Where did this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' come from after this Senior Lin obtain the essence of the 'Sunflower Manual' from the recitation of Huashan School's seniors Yue and Cai? How come this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' that's been passed

down in the Lin family is not very good?" Linghu Chong asked.

Fangzheng replied, "Evil Resisting Sword Art comes from the incomplete book of 'Sunflower Manual'. Both items came from the same origin but both had only a small portion of the original Manual." Fangzheng turned his head around to Chongxu and said, "Brother Taoist, you have more understanding about the art of sword compared to me. Why don't you talk to young hero Linghu about this matter?"

Chongxu laughed. "If we hadn't been friends for many years, old Taoist would've thought that you were teasing me with that kind of talk. In the art of sword, besides Senior Feng's excellence at the current time, who else is above young hero Linghu?"

Fangzheng said, "Even though young hero Linghu's sword art is excellent, no one could even come close to you in comparing the study of sword arts. We're all friends here so we never have to say any meaningless words; there's no need to be polite."

Chongxu let out a sigh before saying, "Actually, Old Taoist knows that the knowledge of the study of sword arts is vast like the sea and that what I know is only like a grain in a big granary. In the future, I don't know whether I'll have the chance to meet Senior Feng to consult him about this." He then turned towards Linghu Chong and said, "Today, the Evil Resisting Sword Art of the Lin family is ordinary and nothing spectacular. But actually it is the same sword art as the one that senior Lin Yuantu used to shake Jianghu back then. In those days, the headmaster of Qingcheng School was Zhang Qingzi (Translator's note: Evergreen in Lanny's translation.) with the nickname 'Number One Sword in the West's Three Gorges' but he still lost to Senior Lin. Today, Qingcheng School's sword art is much better compared to the Fortune Prestige Escort House's Evil Resisting Sword Art; so there must be another reason behind this. What it is, I've been thinking about for a long time already. Actually, all the

warriors who study the art of sword have all been thinking of the reason behind this."

Linghu Chong said, "The family of Martial Brother Lin has all perished; both his father and mother died miserably, that was all because of this doubt?"

"That's right. The reputation of the Evil Resisting Sword Art is very well known, but the martial art of Lin Zhennan was very low. This disparity involuntarily caused other people to think that Lin Zhennan was too dumb and couldn't learn his own family's martial art. They then thought a step further; if this sword manual were in my hand, of course I would be able to learn it until my sword art is as splendid as Lin Yuantu back then. Brother, for the last one hundred years, Lin Yuantu wasn't the only one with a reputable sword art. But Shaolin, Wudang, Emei, Kunlun, Diancang, Qingcheng, and also the five mountains sword schools, all have people to pass their sword arts down to, and other people never thought of actually taking these schools' sword arts. But Lin Zhennan's martial art was very poor like that of a three years old baby, and he also had a lot of gold in his hand, so everyone had the intention of robbing him," Chongxu explained.

Linghu Chong said, "This Senior Lin Yuantu was Reverend Hongxie's disciple and he had studied martial art in the Putian Shaolin Temple. He had most likely studied some astonishing martial art while he was there, so this Evil Resisting Sword Art might be a sword art from the Shaolin School with a few changes and addition of his own. It's not necessarily true that it's a completely different sword art."

Chongxu replied, "There were also many people who thought the same thing. But Evil Resisting Sword Art and Shaolin School's martial art were completely different and all the warriors studying the sword art knew it when they saw it. Hey, hey, even though there were many people with the intention of robbing this sword manual, it was finally that shorty from Qingcheng who moved first. Even though that shorty Yu has a really thick face, he's so stupid. How can he

be compared to your master Mr. Yue who just bided his time and reaped the benefit?"

Linghu Chong's face changed colour as he stammered, "Priest, what... what are you saying?"

Chongxu smiled slightly and said, "That Lin Pingzhi was accepted into your Huashan School. Naturally, that 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' would also be carried into the school with him. I heard that Mr. Yue also has a lovely daughter who he wants to give away to your martial brother Lin, is this right? He really is farsighted."

When Linghu Chong heard Chongxu saying 'Your master Mr. Yue who just bided his time and reaped the benefit', he felt angry that Chongxu was insulting his honoured master. But hearing him say that his master was 'farsighted', he suddenly thought of the days when Master sent second martial brother Lao Denuo in disguise along with little martial sister to Fuzhou to open up a wine shop. He didn't understand Master's intention at that time, but as he thought of it now, it must've been in connection with the Fortune Prestige Escort House. Lin Zhennan's martial art was ordinary and Master had actually planned that move so deliberately, if it weren't for the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', what else could it be for? But Master's plan was done skilfully, unlike that of Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng. Another thought immediately followed, "Little martial sister is an unmarried young girl, but why would Master told her to go out and open up a wine

shop?" At this thought, a cold shiver ran up his spine and he suddenly understood, "Master wanted little martial sister to accompany martial brother Lin; actually this has been arranged a long time ago."

From the look of his face, Fangzheng and Chongxu noted that he looked uncertain and distressed. They knew that he respected his master and that this kind of talk hurt him deeply. Fangzheng said, "These were only idle talks between old monk and Priest Chongxu, we were just wildly speculating. Your respected master is very upright and



known in Wulin as a gentleman. I'm afraid we're just thinking like a small person and absurdly blaming the gentleman." Chongxu smiled slightly on hearing this.

Linghu Chong's heart was in confusion. He was hoping that what Chongxu said was not true, but deep down he knew that every word said was right. Suddenly he thought, "Originally, Senior Lin Yuantu was a monk; that's why there was a Buddhist hall in Xiangyang Lane, and that sword manual was also written on a Buddhist robe. My guess would be that he remembered every word and sentence by heart after being consulted about the Manual by seniors Yue Su and Cai Zifeng on Huashan. As he was still a monk then, that same night he immediately wrote everything down on his robe so that he wouldn't forget anything."

Chongxu said, "Even now, this 'Sunflower Manual' still carries a profound martial art study. Devil Sect has a part of it and your master Mr. Yue has a part of it also. Your martial brother Lin has already joined the Huashan School, so Zuo Lengchan will definitely give Mr. Yue some trouble. He'll have two intentions: one is to kill Mr. Yue in order to merge the five mountains sword schools, and the second one is to snatch this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art'."

Linghu Chong continuously nodded his head and said, "Priest thought correctly. The complete Manual is in Putian Shaolin Temple, does Zuo Lengchan know this? If he does then I'm afraid he'd go and attack the Putian Shaolin Temple."

Fangzheng smiled. "The 'Sunflower Manual' in Putian Shaolin Temple was destroyed a long time ago. So there's no need to worry about it."

Linghu Chong was surprised, "Destroyed?"

Fangzheng answered, "Just before Reverend Hongxie passed away, he gathered all the disciples and told them the result of studying the Manual. Then he immediately put it into the fire saying, 'The martial art study in this manual is

profoundly deep and wonderful, but there are many crucial points in its study. The person who had created it

didn't necessarily manage to study it completely as there are still many difficulties left in the Manual especially the first step in its study. This first step isn't only difficult, it simply couldn't be done. So if it were to be passed on to later generation, it would really be the bad luck of Wulin." He then left behind a letter for the abbot in Songshan's temple saying the same thing."

Linghu Chong sighed. "Reverend Hongxie was really wise. If there were no 'Sunflower Manual' in this world, then all these changes in Wulin wouldn't happen." His thought immediately followed, "No 'Sunflower Manual' means that there's no 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', then master wouldn't have arranged little martial sister to accompany martial brother Lin, and martial brother Lin wouldn't have joined the Huashan School, and he wouldn't have met little martial sister." But he turned around and thought, "But I'm just a wanderer who makes friends with people from the unorthodox path, so what's that has to do with 'Sunflower Manual'? A gentleman follows his own instincts and reaps what he sows; there's no need to blame anyone else."

Chongxu said, "On the fifteenth of next month, Zuo Lengchan will be gathering the five mountains sword schools on Songshan to elect a head master. What's Young Hero Linghu's esteemed opinion on this?"

Linghu Chong laughed. "Is there even a need for an election? This headmaster position naturally belongs to Zuo Lengchan."

"Young Hero Linghu doesn't want to oppose it?" Chongxu asked.

"Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are already secured by him, while my Heng-Shan School is the only one left. Even if we oppose the merger, it'll still be in vain," Linghu Chong answered.

Chongxu shook his head and replied, "That's not so! Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are intimidated by the power of Songshan School so they don't dare to openly object to this. Even if they've said that they agree to the merger, they might not necessarily agree to this in their hearts."

Fangzheng said, "In old monk's opinion, Young Hero must oppose the merger of the five schools. As a principled person, Zuo Lengchan would not necessarily say that everyone

has submitted to his idea. But if the merger were to happen after the talks, then the position of headmaster would definitely be decided by a martial art competition. If Young Hero were to use all of your power, then you'll be able to win the headmaster position from Zuo Lengchan with your superior sword art."

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised. "I... I... How can I do that? I cannot!"

Chongxu said, "Great Master Abbot and Old Taoist already talked about this for a long time and we both feel that Brother is a frank person who does as he pleases; you can even make friends with people from the Devil Sect. If you become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, to be honest, the rules of the Five Mountains School would

relax and the conduct of the disciples might go down. This isn't necessarily the good fortune of Wulin... "

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "What priest said is right, how can junior be capable of taking care of a bunch of other people? If the top were crooked then the bottom would be crooked too. I am only a loafer who likes to drink wine."

Chongxu said, "Neither a loafer nor a wine-lover will harm people, but a person of wild ambition can harm a lot of people. If Brother becomes the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, then firstly, the seniors and disciples of the five mountains sword schools wouldn't be bullied around; secondly, you wouldn't go and attack the Devil Sect

nor would you come to annex our two schools - Shaolin and Wudang; thirdly, Brother also wouldn't annex other schools like Emei, Kunlun and the others."

Fangzheng smiled. "Priest Chongxu and Old Monk have agreed to this plan. Even though we're saying that we're doing this to benefit Jianghu, half of what we're doing is actually for our own benefit."

Chongxu added, "We're speaking frankly here. The old monk and old priest came to Heng-Shan to give our support to Brother and to plead for the lives of people from both the orthodox and demonical path."

Fangzheng joined his palms together and prayed, "Amitufo, if Zuo Lengchan were to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School then who would know when the killings would end."

Linghu Chong took a deep breath and said, "Linghu Chong wouldn't dare decline the order given by seniors. But Junior is a useless person, and it's already very absurd that I became the headmaster of Heng-Shan, but I was forced into it so there's nothing I can do. However, the heroes of the realm will laugh till their teeth fall off if I aspire to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. Junior clearly understands the three things mentioned and yet Junior doesn't dare to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. On the fifteenth of the third month, Junior will surely go to Songshan to make a big disturbance and say that Zuo Lengchan can't become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Perhaps it would be enough for Linghu Chong to just make a big disturbance there."

Chongxu said, "That's absurd. When the time comes and you're forced to do it then you must become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School." Linghu Chong just shook his head. Chongxu went on, "If you didn't go against Zuo Lengchan, then he would definitely become the headmaster. Once the five schools become one, the first thing Headmaster Zuo would do is naturally to kill you first."

Linghu Chong was silent and let out a long sigh. He then said, "That can't be helped then."

Chongxu said, "But if you were able to escape and he was unable to capture you, then Zuo Lengchan will just help himself to killing the disciples of your Heng-Shan School. Dingxian Shi Tai put so many disciples under your hand, are you just going to leave them to be butchered by Zuo Lengchan?"

Linghu Chong slapped the railing on the bridge and said loudly, "I cannot!"

Fangzheng also added, "By then, Zuo Lengchan would also not let your master, master-wife, martial brothers, and martial sisters off. In the years after that, big misfortunes will definitely fall on their heads. Are you still going to ignore all of this?"

Linghu Chong shivered in fear and the hair at the back of his neck stood up. He stepped back a couple of steps and saluted Fangzheng and Chongxu deeply. "Thank you for seniors' advice, otherwise Linghu Chong wouldn't have worked hard and would've harmed many people."

Fangzheng and Chongxu returned his propriety. Fangzheng said, "On the fifteenth of the third month, Old Monk and Priest Chongxu will lead our disciples to go to Songshan to help Young Hero Linghu."

Chongxu said, "If Zuo Lengchan's Songshan School does something against the rules then our Shaolin and Wudang Schools will put a stop to it."

Linghu Chong was happy to hear this and said, "If the two seniors were there to preside over the proceedings then Zuo Lengchan wouldn't dare to commit his evil acts."

The three of them finally finished their discussion. Even though there were many difficult things ahead of them, they felt easier after deciding what to do. Chongxu laughed, "We should return. The new headmaster has been accompanying an old monk and an old Taoist for a long time, they must be wondering where you are. I'm afraid they must be worried by

now." The three of them turned around and had just walked seven or eight steps when suddenly they all halted at the same time.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Who's there?" He was aware of the sounds of breathing coming from one end of the sky bridge. It was apparent that there were people hiding inside the left Spirit Turtle Pavilion of the Hanging Temple.

As soon as he called out, with the sounds of 'peng, peng, peng', many windows of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion were slammed open at the same time. Many arrows were seen pointing out from the windows aimed at the three of them. At the same time, the windows of the Divine Snake Pavillion behind them also slammed open and more arrows were aimed at the three of them.

Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong were the present world's top masters. Under ordinary circumstances, even though the bows and arrows were not ordinary weapons and the people using them were not ordinary either, how could any group actually fight the three of them? But the three of them were on the sky bridge spanning between the two pavilions and below them was a bottomless abyss which prevented them from jumping down. Further more, the bridge was only a few feet wide and limited their manoeuvrability, and added to that, they didn't have any weapons with them. Thus, the trio couldn't help feeling frightened of this ambush.

As a host, Linghu Chong quickly stepped in front of the other two people and shouted, "Daring rats, you don't dare to show yourselves?"

But they only heard someone shouted, "Shoot!"

Seventeen to eighteen black water arrows were immediately shot out from the windows. Unlike ordinary feathered arrows, these water arrows carried water and the water was released from the point of the arrows when shot out. As these water arrows were shot towards the sky, they looked jet black. But as they tipped over in the evening sky,

the arrows turned into a strange colour and the air around Linghu Chong and company was filled with rotten corpse or dead fish smell which made them want to vomit. The tipped over water arrows started to rain down onto the bridge. Some of the water hit the wooden railings of the sky bridge and burned small holes through them. Even though Fangzheng and Chongxu were very experienced, they had never seen this kind of fierce poison water before. If the arrows were just ordinary feathered ones, the three of them could have blocked them by transferring their qi into their sleeves. But as the poison water moistened the top of their bodies, they became afraid that it might bore through to their bones. The two elders looked at each other and saw their expressions changed and their eyes filled with fear. Such fear in the eyes of these two headmasters were really rarely seen.

After this wave of poison water was shot out, that person behind the window shouted out in a clear voice, "This poison water was shot towards the sky. If it was aimed at your bodies, what do you think would have happened?" As he said this, seventeen to eighteen arrows were slowly lowered and aimed at the three of them. The sky bridge ran ten feet long with its left side connected to the Spirit Turtle Pavilion while its right side was connected to the Divine Snake Pavilion. Both pavilions were filled with people pointing poisonous arrows at them. Even though the three of them had high martial arts, it was still very difficult for them to escape. When Linghu Chong heard the bright and clear voice of this person, he recalled whose voice it was. "Chief Dongfang's people with the gift; what a good gift!"

The person speaking from inside the Spirit Turtle Pavilion was really Jia Bu, who was the person sent by Dongfang Bubai with those gifts. Jia Bu laughed loudly and shouted, "Master Linghu is very bright to be able to recognise me from my voice. Since I already used a contemptible deceit to gain the upper hand, and a bright person wouldn't want to fight a losing battle, does master Linghu admit defeat?"

Jia Bu himself already admitted to using a contemptible deceit so Linghu Chong couldn't find any fault with what he said. He moved his qi into his Dantian region and laughed long and loud, shaking the whole valley. "I'm here conversing with seniors from Shaolin and Wudang, and all the people who came up the mountain today are my good friends, so I didn't arrange for any protection. So now I have fallen into Brother Jia's trap and I cannot not admit my defeat." Linghu Chong answered.

Jia Bu replied, "That's very good. Chief Dongfang respects the seniors of Wulin and regards the importance of young heroes highly. Furthermore, Young Lady Ren has grown up under Chief Dongfang from a very young age. So in respect towards Young Lady Ren, we don't dare to be rude towards Master Linghu." Linghu Chong just uttered an 'hng' without answering back.

While Linghu Chong was talking to Jia Bu, Fangzheng and Chongxu were observing the situation and were looking for a crack in their line to rush at. But looking at the numerous water arrows at their front and back, even though they would be able to wipe out more than ten arrows at the same time, it would be impossible to take them all out. Even if their enemies managed to just shoot one water arrow through, it would be very difficult for the three of them to protect their lives. After the two of them had a look around, both of their eyes seemed to be saying, "We can't act rashly."

They heard Jia Bu went on, "Since Master Linghu already admitted defeat, both parties can avoid injuries. This is really what I wished for. Chief Dongfang actually ordered us to invite Master Linghu, Shaolin Temple's Abbot, and Wudang School's Headmaster Priest to attend a banquet at my humble sect's gathering altar on Dark Wood Cliff for several days. It's really our good fortune that the three of you are here together. How about if we go now?"

Linghu Chong uttered another 'hng', thinking how could there be such an easy thing in this world because once the



three of them left the sky bridge, subduing Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun would be as easy as turning over his palm. As expected, Jia Bu followed by saying, "But the martial arts of the three of you are too high; if you change your mind midway through the journey and are not willing to go to Dark Wood Cliff, then we'll have no way of stopping you. That's why we gathered our nerves to ask the three of you to lend us your three right hands."

"Lend you our three right hands?" Linghu Chong asked.

"That's right. Could the three of you please cut your right arms first? Then we'll be much more at ease," Jia Bu replied.

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "That's how it is. Dongfang Bubai is afraid of our sword arts so he planned this trap. He wanted us to cut our right arms so we couldn't use any weapons. Then, he'll have no more worries."

Jia Bu replied, "It's not certain that he'll have no more worries. But Ren Woxing would've lost a powerful help and that would've weakened him by a lot."

"Sir, you're speaking very frankly," Linghu Chong said.

"I'm just a nobody," Jia Bu said. He raised his voice and said, "Great Master Abbot, Headmaster Priest, are you two going to peacefully give your arms up or are you going to stake your lives here?"

Chongxu replied, "Alright! Dongfang Bubai wants to borrow our arms, so we'll lend our arms to him. But we're not carrying any weapons with us so it's difficult to cut our arms off." As he just finished saying this, a flash of light flew out from the window as a steel ring was tossed out. This steel ring was a foot long in diameter and had a very sharp edge. There was a horizontal bar in the middle to hold it. It was another sect's weapon. If there was a pair of these, then it would become a 'Qiankun Ring'. Linghu Chong was standing at the front so he extended his hand to grab it. He couldn't help laughing bitterly as he thought that this Jia Bu had really calculated everything. Even though the edge of this steel ring was very sharp and useful for cutting off their arms,

it was too short to brandish around and block the incoming water arrows.

Jia Bu shouted out severely, "Since you have already promised, quickly cut your arm off! Don't drag the time along thinking that someone's coming to your rescue. I'm going to count to three! If your arms are not cut by then, I'll release the poison water. One!"

Linghu Chong said in a whisper, "I'll charge at them first, follow behind me!"

"No!" Chongxu replied.

"Two!" Jia Bu continued with his count.

Linghu Chong lifted the steel ring with his left hand while thinking, "Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu are my Heng-Shan School's guests, so I can't let them be harmed. When his count reaches three, I'm going to toss this steel ring, brandish my sleeves and charge up. All the poison water would definitely be aimed at me and the two of them may find an opportunity to get away." He then heard Jia Bu calling out, "Everyone, get ready! I'm about to call 'three'!"

Suddenly, they heard a clear and crisp female voice shouting from the top of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion. "Wait!" Someone wearing a pale green gown floated down from the top of the pavilion and landed in front of Linghu Chong. It was Yingying.

Linghu Chong hastily called out, "Yingying, step back!"

Yingying shook her left hand a few times at Linghu Chong at her back. She then called out, "Uncle Jia, the Honourable Yellow Face is very well known throughout Jianghu. Since when are you doing this kind of improper things!"

Jia Bu replied, "This... Young Lady, you... move away, don't touch the water."

"What are you doing here? Uncle Dongfang told you and Uncle Shangguan to deliver gifts to me here. How did you get bribed by Songshan School's Zuo Lengchan that you are

actually being rude towards the Headmaster of Heng-Shan School?" Yingying chided.

"Who said I've been bribed by Zuo Lengchan? I received Chief Dongfang's secret order to capture Linghu Chong and bring him back to the Dark Wood Cliff."

"Nonsense. Chief's Dark Command Wood is here. Chief's order is: Jia Bu is secretly rebelling. Anyone who sees him must capture and execute him immediately and will be heaped with gifts!" As she said this, she raised her right hand high above her head holding the Dark Command Wood.

Jia Bu was furious and he shouted, "Release the arrow!"

"Did Chief Dongfang tell you to kill me?" Yingying asked.

"You're disobeying Chief's decree..."

"Uncle Shangguan, seize that traitor Jia Bu and you'll be promoted to the position of Elder of the Green Dragon Hall," Yingying called out.

Shangguan Yun thought to himself that his martial art was much higher than Jia Bu and that his experience was much deeper compared to Jia Bu when they entered the sect. But Jia Bu was the Green Dragon Hall's Elder, while he was an Elder of a lower hall which was called the White Tiger Hall, so of course there was much jealousy in his heart. Once he heard Yingying's call, he hesitated on what to do. Yingying was the daughter of the former Chief Ren, who now had re-entered Jianghu and would definitely plan to take back the chief position. Even though Chief Dongfang had always been respectful towards Young Lady Ren, his attitude towards her would certainly be very different now. However, he still would never dare to lead these men to shoot poison water at Yingying.

Jia Bu again called out, "Release the arrow!"

But those men he commanded had always revered Yingying as if she was a goddess, and also, she was holding the Dark Command Wood in her hand. How could they dare to be rude towards her?

Suddenly, in the middle of this deadlock, someone from below the Spirit Turtle Pavilion shouted, "Fire, fire!" A red flame was burning and black smoke rose above. It seemed that there really was a fire burning at the bottom floor of the pavilion. Yingying loudly called out, "Jia Bu, you're very cruel! Why are you trying to burn your subordinates to death?"

Jia Bu angrily responded, "Nonsen..."

Yingying interrupted, "Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu! People from the Divine Sun Moon Sect, Chief Dongfang has an order: Quickly put out the fire!" After she said this, she quickly charged forward.

Linghu Chong, Fangzheng, and Chongxu took advantage of the situation to charge forward. Between Yingying calling out the sect's motto and the fire burning underneath the pavilion, chaos ensued amongst the sect's people. Linghu Chong and his two companions flew halfway past the sky bridge and rushed into the building through the window which made the people inside unable to release their poison arrows. Linghu Chong quickly grabbed a long candlestick and wielded it in his right hand. He knew that the poison water was very severe and only a little bit of it had to be splashed on your body for you to suffer endlessly. Fangzheng and Chongxu were using their palms to chop and legs to kick without any mercy, and in no time at all, seven to eight people had been killed. He treated the candlestick in his hand like a long sword and stabbed it towards people's throats, and in a short time had killed six people. When Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun came to Heng-Shan, they carried forty boxes with them which were carried by two people each (I guess Jin Yong miscounted.... In ch 29, he said four people carried each box.). So altogether they had eighty people. These eighty people were actually the most powerful people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect with good martial arts. Forty people were distributed to encircle the Hanging Temple, while the remaining forty people were hidden in the two

pavilions. In a short time, Linghu Chong and the other two people had killed all twenty people in that one pavilion.

Jia Bu was using a pair of judge's pens while Yingying was using a pair of long and short swords as they fought fiercely. When Linghu Chong first met Yingying, he only heard her voice but never saw her. Later on, he experienced how powerful she was and saw how she was feared by that crowd of heroes but he didn't know the reason. He felt feelings of affection but didn't know where his feelings came from. That day when Yingying killed some Shaolin disciples and fought against Great Master Fangsheng, Linghu Chong only saw her shadow and did not actually see her fight. So this was the first time that he had clearly seen her fighting with someone. Seeing her moving lightly and quickly, swiftly going here and there with her pair of long and

short swords fluttering all of a sudden, attacking strangely with intermingled feints and true thrusts, even though she was really in front of him, in Linghu Chong's heart, he still felt as if he was floating, like the smoke, like the fog.

The two judge's pens that Jia Bu was using were really heavy. When he slashed them out, it was as if he was using a steel whip and Yingying didn't want her pair of swords to clash with his judge's pens. Each of Jia Bu's moves was aimed at a major acupoint on Yingying's body but he was always a hairsbreadth short in striking her.

Great Master Fangzheng shouted, "Evil creature, you're still not putting down your weapon and be captured?"

Jia Bu saw that there was only death waiting for him today, so he combined his pair of pens into one and stabbed them towards Yingying's throat. Linghu Chong was startled and was really afraid that Yingying might not be able to avoid this attack, so he quickly stabbed out with the candlestick in his hand. He stabbed out twice hitting both of Jia Bu's wrists. Jia Bu felt his fingers became powerless and

dropped both of his judge's pens. He quickly rushed at Linghu Chong with both of his palms together.

Great Master Fangzheng sent both of his palms up in a slant and captured both of Jia Bu's hands. Jia Bu forcefully struggled but he was unable to get away. He immediately kicked out violently with his left leg towards Fangzheng's lower body. Fangzheng let out a sigh and sent out both of his palms and sent Jia Bu flying out of the door. They heard him roaring out miserably, and his shout receded further and further away from them as he fell down towards the deep valley outside of Mount Cui Ping. Linghu Chong smiled towards Yingying and said, "Lucky you came to the rescue!"

Yingying smiled back at him. "Luckily I arrived in time!" She followed by shouting, "Put out the fire!"

Someone from below the pavilion responded, "Yes!"

Originally, the fire that was underneath the pavilion was burnt by using sulfur mixed with grass so that it would make Jia Bu uneasy. It wasn't actually a real fire. Yingying walked to the window and called out towards the Divine Snake Pavilion, "Uncle Shangguan, Jia Bu defied orders and that's why he met with this disaster. Why don't you lead those people out of the pavilion now? I won't give you any trouble."

Shangguan Yun replied, "Young lady, swear it for me to believe you."

"I'll swear to the past dynasties of the sect. If Shangguan Yun listens to my orders, then from now on, I won't harm him. If I violate this oath, then the three corpse bugs will eat my brain to death," Yingying swore.

This was Sun Moon Sect's highest form of oath, so when Shangguan Yun heard it, he was immediately relieved and led the twenty people out of the pavilion. When Linghu Chong and others walked out of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion, they saw Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and tens of other people waiting underneath the pavilion. Linghu Chong asked Yingying, "How did you know that Jia Bu and his men wanted to attack us?"

"Why would Dongfang Bubai be that nice to you and be sincere in giving you gifts? I already suspected from the beginning that those forty boxes contained some kind of deceit. Later, I saw Jia Bu acting suspiciously and leading his men here, so I was really suspicious and took Mr. Old and the others here to take a look. Those rice buckets guarding at the foot of Mount Cui Ping didn't want to let us go up the

mountain, and in a short while revealed their true character," Yingying told him.

Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and the men laughed at this. Shangguan Yun hung his head down looking ashamed. Linghu Chong sighed, "This is only my first day as the Headmaster of the Heng-Shan School, and my true character as an incapable fool has already been revealed. I knew that those people sent by Dongfang Bubai were up to no good but I didn't take any precautions. If Linghu Chong dies, then that's deserved. But if Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu suffered under the hands of those traitors... Ai!" As he said this, he kept shaking his head.

Yingying said, "Uncle Shangguan, from today onwards, are you going to follow me or are you still going to follow Dongfang Bubai?"

Shangguan Yun's face changed colour as it was a hard decision for him to make to betray Chief Dongfang. Yingying went on, "Amongst the ten elders in the divine sect, six have taken my father's three corpse brain pills. Are you going to take this pill or not?" She extended her hand and in her open palm was a red pill. Shangguan Yun trembled, "Young lady, you're saying from amongst the sect's ten elders, six elders have... six elders..."

"That's right. You've never worked for my father before. So you're not considered to have betrayed my father when you worked for Dongfang Bubai in these last few years. If you could abandon that dark world, then I'd appreciate it, and my father would definitely appreciate it too," Yingying said.

Shangguan Yun looked around and he thought in his heart, "If I don't surrender, it seems that I'll lose my life right here. Since six out of the ten elders have returned to Chief Ren, things have moved really quickly. I couldn't be the last one left still swearing loyalty to Chief Dongfang." Having decided thus, he immediately took the three-corpse brain pill from Yingying's palm and swallowed it. He then said bowing to Yingying, "Shangguan Yun is thankful for young lady's kindness for not killing me. From today, I will strive to complete your order and would never dare to disobey them."

"We're on the same side, there's no need for such a huge propriety. These brothers under you, they naturally follow you?" Yingying asked.

Shangguan Yun turned his head to look at the twenty men behind him. Those men saw that their leader had just surrendered and had also taken the three-corpse brain pill, so they immediately prostrated themselves on the ground and paid their respects to Yingying. They all said, "We're willing to obey Sacred Lady's order, ten thousand

deaths will not deter us." At this time, the crowd of heroes had extinguished the fire. When they saw that Yingying had subdued Shangguan Yun, they all congratulated her. Shangguan Yun's martial art was already very high in the Sun Moon Sect, and his position was also very honourable, so with Yingying subduing him, this had helped Ren Woxing greatly in taking back the leadership of the sect.

Fangzheng and Chongxu saw that the situation had gone back to normal so they took their leaves and went down the mountain. Linghu Chong went with them for several li before parting ways. Yingying and Linghu Chong were walking shoulder to shoulder as they went back to Xianxing Peak. She said, "Dongfang Bubai is a very violent person, and you already saw this methods for yourself. My father and Uncle Xiang are in the process of getting more support from inside the sect to return the sect to its former leadership. The ones



who happily submit to us are naturally the best, while the ones who don't agree are settled one by one, so that Dongfang Bubai will be weakened. At this moment, Dongfang Bubai has started his counter attack. He sent Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun to take care of you. This was a really good move from him because my father and Uncle Xiang's whereabouts are a secret so Dongfang Bubai couldn't find them. But if they wanted to harm you, I...I..." As she said this, her face blushed furiously and she turned her head away.

As the evening set in, the night wind blew her soft hair around till they covered both of her cheeks. Seeing her snow white neck, his heart was moved. He thought, "She's been passionately devoted to me for a long time and everyone in the world knows about this. Even Dongfang Bubai wanted to capture me in order to threaten her and also to threaten her father. On top of the sky bridge at the Hanging Temple, she knew clearly that the ambush was unpassable so she jumped in front of me afraid that I might get injured. To have a wife like this, what more can Linghu Chong ask for?" With this thought, he extended his arms to hug her waist.

Yingying giggled and leaned her body to one side making Linghu Chong hug an empty space. Even though his sword art was wonderful and his internal energy was abundant, his fist, kicking, hand-seizing, lightness, and other martial arts lacked by a lot. Yingying laughed, "As a Headmaster of a school, how can you act with no rules or customs?"

Laughing also, Linghu Chong replied, "Amongst all the headmasters in the world, Heng-Shan School's headmaster is by far the most ordinary and is the one laughed at by everyone."

Yingying seriously said, "Why are you saying that? Even the Abbot of Shaolin and the headmaster of Wudang respect you. Who would dare to look down on you? Are you going to keep the matter of your expulsion from Huashan in your heart forever and always be ashamed in front of other

people?" These few words that Yingying said really touched the matter that was in Linghu Chong's heart. Even though he had a carefree nature, he was still heartbroken and still harboured a deep hurt for being expelled from the Huashan School. He couldn't help sighing when he heard this and bowed his head. Yingying pulled his hand and said, "You're now the Headmaster of Heng-Shan and you should be proud and elated in front of the realm's heroes. The reputations of the two schools Heng-Shan and Huashan are equal. Could it be that the honourable position of Heng-Shan School's Headmaster isn't as good as being the disciple of Huashan School?"

"Thank you for your advice. But I've always felt being the headmaster of nuns is embarrassing and laughable," Linghu Chong replied.

"Today, there's close to a thousand heroes who have joined the Heng-Shan School. Amongst the five mountains sword schools, if we talk about the glory of the schools, only Songshan School could be compared to you. How could the other schools like Taishan, Hengshan and Huashan be compared to you?" Yingying said.

"I haven't thanked you for this yet."

Yingying smiled. "Thank me for what?"

"You were afraid that it won't be too reputable for me to become the leader of nuns so you sent your men to join Heng-Shan. If it weren't for Sacred Lady's order, how could those wild and unruly friends agree to become the martial brothers and sisters of these nuns - not to mention obediently receiving my restrictions?"

Yingying, with pursed lips holding her laughter, said, "That might not be true. You have been their chief when you were attacking the Shaolin Temple, so everyone had already accepted you long before."

The two of them chatted easily as they went up the mountain. When they got closer to the convent, they faintly heard the clamours of those heroes. Yingying halted her step

and said, "We'll part here. Once my father's matter is settled then I'll come here to see you."

Linghu Chong's chest suddenly felt heated and he replied, "You're going to the Dark Wood Cliff?"

"Yes."

"I'll go with you."

Yingying's eyes flashed with happiness but she shook her head.

Linghu Chong asked, "You don't want me to go with you?"

"You just became the headmaster of Heng-Shan School today and now you want to come with me to settle the Sun Moon Sect's matter. Even though there's no one higher than you in Heng-Shan School, don't you think doing this is too much?"

Linghu Chong reasoned, "It's very dangerous to go up against Dongfang Bubai. How could I just stay outside of the matter and let you go into danger by yourself?"

"Those Jianghu friends who are living in Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard, I can't say for certain that they won't offend the ladies in Heng-Shan School."

"You only need to order them not to do it then they definitely won't dare."

"Alright, since you're willing to go with me, I thank you on behalf of Daddy."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "You're thanking me and I'm thanking you, why are we being so polite?"

Yingying smiled captivatingly and said, "Don't blame me for being impolite to you in the future."

After walking for a while, Yingying said, "My daddy said that since you don't want to join the sect, he doesn't want your help in taking back the sect's leadership, but... but..." She said till here when her face turned scarlet.

"Even though I'm not joining the Sun Moon Sect, I'm not an outsider to you. If your father asks me to leave, then I'll

just thicken my face and refuse to leave," Linghu Chong told her.

Yingying smiled, "My daddy would surely feel happy to get your help."

The two of them returned to the top of Xianxing Peak and separately went to their disciples to leave them with some orders. Linghu Chong ordered all his disciples to practise their martial arts diligently, and told them that he was escorting Yingying back and would be returning to the mountain after that. Yingying told the group of heroes that if any of them dared to set foot on Xianxing Peak from that day onwards, she would have their legs cut off. If their left foot stepped on the peak then their left leg would be chopped, if it were their right foot then their right leg would be chopped, and if both feet stepped on the Peak then both legs would be chopped off.

At dawn the next morning, Linghu Chong and Yingying said their many goodbyes, and went down the mountain with Shangguan Yun and his twenty men and commenced on their journey to Dark Wood Cliff.

Dark Wood Cliff lay east of Heng-Shan inside the prefecture of Hebei. Within a day, they had arrived at the boundary of that prefecture. During the journey, Linghu Chong and Yingying separately sat inside two sedan chairs and always kept the curtains down to avoid Dongfang Bubai from detecting them. That very evening, Yingying and Linghu Chong stayed at an inn very close to the gathering altar of the Sun Moon Sect, so the place around the inn was crawling with the sect's people coming and going. Shangguan Yun ordered four of his men to guard the front and back of the inn and not let anyone into the inn. At supper time, Yingying accompanied Linghu Chong in drinking wine. The fireplace in the inn was blazing brightly and the light shone on Yingying's face, revealing her tenderness.

After drinking a few cups of wine, Linghu Chong said, "That day inside the Shaolin Temple, your father said that amongst all the heroes in the realm, there are three and a half who he admires. Amongst them, Dongfang Bubai is number one. This person snatched the chief position from your father's hands, so naturally his ability and wisdom are high. It's also said in Jianghu that Dongfang Bubai is number one in terms of martial art, is this saying true?"

"This Dongfang Bubai definitely works really hard and is also very scheming. But I'm not certain about the level of his martial art because in the last few years, I've actually not seen him."

Linghu Chong nodded. "These past few years you've been living at the Bamboo Alley at Luoyang city so of course you haven't seen him."

"That's not true. Even though I lived in that Bamboo Alley, I went back to Dark Wood Cliff once or twice every year and yet, I never got to see Dongfang Bubai. I heard from the elders in the sect that for the past few years, it was getting harder and harder to see Chief," Yingying told him.

Linghu Chong said, "A person of such high status often doesn't want to see other people so no one can see how different they are."

Yingying replied, "This certainly is one of the reasons. But my guess is that he's ardently practising the 'Sunflower Manual' martial arts, and isn't willing to be disturbed by sect's matters."

"Your father once said that during the time he was studying 'The Art of Essence Absorbing' to meld all the different types of internal energy in his body, he ignored all sect's matters, and let Dongfang Bubai usurped his power. Could it be that Dongfang Bubai is repeating the same mistake that your father made?"

"Since Dongfang Bubai isn't personally taking care of sect's business, in these last few years, all of the sect's affairs and power have been turned over to a little kid surnamed

Yang. This little kid couldn't possibly seize Dongfang Bubai's power and thus repeat the same thing again," Yingying explained.

"A little kid named Yang? Who's that? How come I've never heard of him before?"

Yingying's face suddenly turned red, and she smiled, "There's no dirtier thing to say except for his name. No one in the sect would even mention his name; so no one outside the sect would know of him. So, of course, you've never heard his name before."

Linghu Chong's curiosity was peaked. "My dear, tell me about him."

"That Yang person is called Yang Lianting. He's around twenty years old, his martial art is really low, and he has no ability at all. But recently Dongfang Bubai had pampered him so much; it really is remarkable." As she said this, her whole face turned dark and her mouth twisted; it seemed that she really despised this person.

Linghu Chong was disappointed. "Ah, this Yang person is Dongfang Bubai's boyfriend. Originally, Dongfang Bubai was a great hero, but he likes... likes pretty boys."

Yingying said, "Don't say it! I don't understand what Dongfang Bubai's thoughts are. He always tells Yang Lianting to handle all of his business, and a lot of brothers in the sect have been harmed by this Yang kid. We must kill..."

Suddenly, someone from outside the window laughed. "You're wrong. We should thank Yang Lianting."

Yingying happily called out, "Daddy!" And she quickly went to the door to open it.

Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian entered the room. The two of them were wearing farmers' garb and the big hats on their heads covered half of their faces. If they hadn't heard Ren Woxing's voice, they wouldn't have been able to recognise them just by their faces. Linghu Chong stood up to pay his respects and told the servant to bring two more sets of chopsticks, more wine and dishes.

Ren Woxing was looking high-spirited as he said, "These last few days, Brother Xiang and I have been contacting our old comrades in the sect, and it was unexpectedly very easy to get them on our side. Eight out of ten people that we contacted were extremely happy. They all said that in the last few years, most of his friends and allies have already left him because Dongfang Bubai's actions have been really perverse especially with regards to Yang Lianting. Yang Lianting was originally just a lowly soldier in the sect. But for whatever reason, he managed to curry favour from Dongfang Bubai and take over the sect's power in his hand. Many of the people in the sect have either been removed or killed by him. If it weren't for the strict rules of the sect, they would've rebelled a long time ago. That Yang Lianting has helped us greatly in this matter, how could we not thank him greatly for this?"

Yingying said, "That's right." Then she asked, "Daddy, how did you know that we've arrived?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "Brother Xiang and Shangguan Yun fought for a while before he found out that Shangguan Yun had surrendered to you."

"Uncle Xiang, did you hurt him?"

Xiang Wentian laughed and replied, "Hurting the Eagle Hero Shangguan isn't an easy thing to do."

Suddenly, they heard the sounds of whistling which made the hair at the back of their neck stood up.

Yingying said, "Could it be that Dongfang Bubai know that we're here?" She then turned around to Linghu Chong to explain, "This whistling sound is our sect's signal to notify that there are rebels and assassins in the area. Once the people in the sect hear this, they would be prepared to apprehend the rebels with all their might."

After some time, they heard four horses galloping quickly across the long street. The people on the horses were passing on the order: "Chief's order: Wind and Thunder Hall's Elder Tong Baixiong is colluding with the enemy to rebel against

the sect. Apprehend him immediately! If there is anyone who disobeys this order, kill them without question."

Yingying absentmindedly said, "Uncle Tong! How can that be?" They heard the sound of horses' hooves gradually getting farther away as the riders passed the order down. Observing this situation, it seemed that Sun Moon Sect had control of the entire area and the local government had no power at all.

Ren Woxing said, "Dongfang Bubai is very well informed; we just met with old Tong yesterday."

Yingying imploringly asked, "Uncle Tong already promised to help us?"

Ren Woxing shook his head. "How could he agree to betray Dongfang Bubai? Brother Xiang and I talked with him for half a day, and at the end that Old Tong said: 'Brother Dongfang and I are friends beyond death. The two of you don't realise that by talking to me today, you've looked down on Tong Baixiong, thinking that I'm a friend who could be bought. Recently, Chief Dongfang had been confounded by a lot of small people and had made a lot of mistakes. But thinking that he's bringing ruin and shame to himself, I can't bring myself to blame him for this. I'm not your match so if you want to kill me or peel my flesh off - then go ahead.' This Old Tong really is something, the older he gets the more vicious he gets."

Linghu Chong praised him, "Good man!"

Yingying said, "If he didn't agree to help us, how come Dongfang Bubai wants to capture him?"

Xiang Wentian replied, "This is called taking unreasonable measures. Dongfang Bubai isn't that old yet, but he's very confused already. Old Tong is such a loyal friend to him; where else can you find such a man in this world?"

Ren Woxing clapped his hands and laughed. "If Dongfang Bubai can even get angry at the type of people like Old Tong, we'll definitely complete our business! Come, bottoms up!" The four of them drank their cups. Yingying said to Linghu



Chong, "Uncle Tong is our sect's first elder and he has done a big service to the sect sometime in the past, and everyone in the sect respects him deeply. He never got on well with daddy but is very close with Dongfang Bubai. So according to reason, even if he did a big mistake, Dongfang Bubai wouldn't trouble him."

Ren Woxing was jubilant as he said, "As Dongfang Bubai is focusing on capturing Tong Baixiong, the situation on top of Dark Wood Cliff is likely chaotic. We can take advantage of this time to go up the cliff. This is very good."

Xiang Wentian said, "We'll ask Brother Shangguan to discuss this with us."

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "Very good."

Xiang Wentian went out and immediately came back into the room with Shangguan Yun. When Shangguan Yun saw Ren Woxing, he immediately bowed and said, "Subordinate Shangguan Yun pays his respect to Chief. Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Brother Shangguan, I heard that you're a hard man who doesn't like to speak much. How come you're speaking like that now?"

Shangguan Yun looked blank as he said, "Subordinate doesn't understand. Chief, please advise me."

"Daddy, you heard Uncle Shangguan said 'Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu', and you felt that these words were too lofty, didn't you?" Yingying inquired.

"What long live, unify the Jianghu, am I an emperor?" Ren Woxing asked.

Yingying smilingly replied, "This was Dongfang Bubai's idea. He wanted all the subordinates to say these words when they see him. He also wanted the brothers in the sect to also say this to each other when he's not around. This phrase was made up not too long ago. Uncle Shangguan is too accustomed in saying this so he also said this to you."

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "I see. Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu. What a beautiful idea! But I'm

not an immortal, so how can I live for thousands of years? Brother Shangguan, I heard that Dongfang Bubai wants to capture old Tong, so I thought we should go up the cliff tonight as Dark Wood Cliff would be in confusion. What do you think of this?"<sup>40</sup>

Shangguan Yun answered, "Chief's order is wise. This is a foolproof plan that really opens everyone's eyes. This plan is for the benefit of every common people in this world. This plan cannot be defeated and thus, victory is assured. Subordinate will carry out this order. I will always be loyal to Chief and would never balk at a thousand deaths."

Ren Woxing muttered to himself, "People in Jianghu says that 'Eagle Hero' Shangguan Yun's martial art is high and he's a frank person. How come he talks so flatteringly and says so many clichés just like a shameless small person? Could it be that those rumours in Jianghu are false, and his reputation is false?" He scowled at this thought.

Yingying smilingly said, "Daddy, we must disguise ourselves before going up the Dark Wood Cliff so we don't get recognised. But the most important thing is for us to learn the jargons of Dark Wood Cliff, or else you'll say everything wrongly."

"What Dark Wood Cliff's jargons?"

"Uncle Shangguan said something like 'Chief's order is wise. This is a foolproof plan that really opens everyone's eyes'; also 'Subordinate will carry out this order. I will always be loyal to Chief and would never balk at a thousand deaths'. These kinds of talks are the jargons of the upper class people in Dark Wood Cliff for the last few years now. All these jargons were thought of by that Yang Lianting to flatter Dongfang Bubai. The more he heard it, the more he liked it, so later, when someone doesn't speak like this, it's a really big offence to him. Also, if there were a slight disrespect in the way you say it, you'll immediately be killed," Yingying explained.

"Do you also say all these bullshits when you see Dongfang Bubai?" Ren Woxing asked.

"If I'm at Dark Wood Cliff, what can I do but to say these words? That's why I live at Luoyang city to avoid all these crazy talks."

"Brother Shangguan, you don't need to say these words between us," Ren Woxing told him.

"Yes. Chief's sacred order only comes around every one hundred years and it cannot be replaced by ten thousand lives. The sacred order is like the brilliance of the sun and the moon illuminating the world, subordinate will obey the order," Shangguan Yun replied. Yingying pursed her lips, not daring to laugh.

Ren Woxing asked, "What do you think is the best way for us to go up Dark Wood Cliff?"

Shangguan Yun replied, "Chief is confident and is a divine strategist; in the present age nobody can come close to your brilliance. In the presence of Chief, how can subordinate dare to offer my trivial idea?"

Ren Woxing scowled and said, "When Dongfang Bubai discusses a matter with the sect, no one dares to say anything?"

"Dongfang Bubai's ability and wisdom is above everyone, and no one has as much experience as he is. Even if someone has a thought about it, they wouldn't dare to speak to avoid a sudden misfortune befalling them," Yingying said.

Ren Woxing said, "That's how it is. That's very good, extremely good! Brother Shangguan, what order did Dongfang Bubai give you to capture Linghu Chong?"

"He said whoever captures Hero Linghu would be heaped with gifts. If we couldn't capture him, then we should bring our own heads to him," Shangguan Yun said.

Ren Woxing laughed. "Very good, tie Linghu Chong up and claim your gifts."

Shangguan Yun retreated a step, and fear was etched on his face. "Hero Linghu is Chief's beloved general, and he has

done a big service to our sect. How could Subordinate dare to commit this sin?"

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "It's very hard to go up to Dongfang Bubai's place, but if you're taking the bound up Linghu Chong up, he would definitely let us see him."

Yingying smiled, "Wonderful plan! We'll go up and see Dongfang Bubai pretending to be Uncle Shangguan's subordinates. Once we see him, we'll get our weapons out and attack him. Even though his martial art is high, he'll still find it difficult to fight four pair of hands with his one pair."

Xiang Wentian added, "It'll be best if Brother Linghu pretends to be heavily injured and has his feet and hands bound. We'll splash some blood on him to make it real and then we'll carry him up using a stretcher. Dongfang Bubai wouldn't have any protections against this plan, and we can also store weapons in the stretcher."

"Very good, very good," Ren Woxing agreed with this plan.

They then heard the sound of horses' hooves galloping on the long street, with someone shouting, "We've captured the Master of Wind and Thunder Hall. We've captured the Master of Wind and Thunder Hall!"

Yingying beckoned Linghu Chong to go with her. The two of them went to the entrance of the inn and saw tens of men on horses carrying torches. They were crowding around a tall and strong old man as they went past the street. That old man had a white beard and his face was full of blood. His two hands were bound behind his back and his eyes were staring ahead brightly as if they were spouting fire. It was apparent that he was furious.

Yingying whispered, "Five to six years ago, when Dongfang Bubai met uncle Tong, they were even more close to each other than the two bear brothers. Who could've thought that he would turn ruthless against him today?"

Not long after that, Shangguan Yun came carrying a stretcher with him. Yingying bound Linghu Chong's arms

using a white cloth and hung the cloth on his neck. They then slaughtered a sheep and smeared the sheep's blood all over his body. Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian both changed into the uniform of the sect, and Yingying also changed into a man's clothes. They all smeared their faces black. After all of them had eaten and worn the uniforms of Shangguan Yun's subordinates, they went on their way to Dark Wood Cliff.

Forty li northwest of the Dingzhou prefecture, the mountain rock was dark red like blood, and there was a creek called Ape Creek with water rushing by. As they went further north, the cliffs on their sides rose up like walls, and the mountain road spanned only five feet wide in between the two cliffs. The road to the gathering altar of the Sun Moon Sect was heavily guarded by members of the sect, who were very respectful toward them because of Shangguan Yun. After passing three checkpoints, they arrived to another creek. Shangguan Yun released a signal arrow and three boats from the other side came over to them. Linghu Chong secretly thought, "Sun Moon Sect's hundreds years of existence really isn't a small matter. If it weren't for Shangguan Yun leading the way, we would've had to attack from the outside. That wouldn't be very easy at all."

On the other side of the creek, the way up the mountain was very steep. Everyone had to abandon their horses. Some people in the party carried torches to light up their way. Yingying walked besides the stretcher with her hand on her pair of swords guarding Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong felt the constant danger he was in as they went up the mountain. If the people carrying the stretcher decided that they didn't want to carry him anymore, they could just dump him into the deep valley besides the road and he would certainly die by their hands. When they reached the gathering altar, the sky was still dark. Shangguan Yun quickly ordered someone to report to Dongfang Bubai that he had successfully completed Chief's

order. After some time, the sound of tinkling bells was heard and Shangguan Yun immediately stood up and respectfully waited.

Yingying pulled Ren Woxing up and whispered, "Chief's order has arrived. Quickly get up." Ren Woxing immediately stood up and saw that all the sect members inside the altar were suddenly standing still and motionless, as if they had come under a demonic spell. The tinkling bells rang really fast before stopping. Not long after it stopped, a person wearing the yellow gown of a sect's disciple appeared holding a yellow scroll with both hands. He read the scroll out loud, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, just and wise Chief Dongfang commands: Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun have successfully carried out the order and have returned. This is an excellent achievement. Bring the captive along with you up the cliff."

Shangguan Yun bowed. "Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Linghu Chong found this hilarious. He thought to himself, "Isn't this what the court eunuchs usually read out?"

He then heard Shangguan Yun's loud reply, "Chief has granted subordinate to ascend the cliff. I will never forget this supreme virtue and benevolence." Shangguan Yun's subordinates also replied together, "Chief has granted subordinates to ascend the cliff. We will never forget this supreme virtue and benevolence." Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian followed along but secretly cursed.

Their party went up the stone steps ascending toward the cliff and passed three iron doors along the way. At each iron door, a person asked them for that night's password and also inspected what they were carrying on their bodies. At last, they reached a stone gate with inscriptions on each side of it. The sentence on the right side read 'Refined Scholar, Kind-hearted Warrior', while the sentence on the left side said 'Just and Wise'. There was a board hung horizontally

above the gate with the red letterings saying 'Brilliance of Sun and Moon'.

After they passed the stone gate, they saw a big bamboo basket on the ground which could probably hold more than ten catties worth of rice. Shangguan Yun shouted, "Take the captive in." Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying stooped down to pick up the stretcher and entered into the bamboo basket.

A copper gong was sounded three times and the bamboo basket was slowly pulled up. There was a pulley system on the top which allowed the bamboo basket to be pulled up. As the bamboo basket slowly ascended, Linghu Chong raised his head to take a look and saw only many dots of stars around him which made him realize how high the Dark Wood Cliff really was. Yingying extended her right arm and held his left hand. In the middle of the night, they were still able to see white clouds floating just above their heads. After some time, they entered a white fog, and when they looked down, they were not able to see anything except darkness around them.

After a long time, the bamboo basket finally stopped. Shangguan Yun and his men helped lift Linghu Chong out of the basket. Then they proceeded to the left for tens of feet before encountering another bamboo basket. Actually the peak of the cliff was too high so it required four pulley systems to reach the top. Linghu Chong pondered in his heart, "It'd be very difficult for Dongfang Bubai's subordinates to see him since he lives in such a high place."

When they reached the cliff's peak, the sun had already risen and it was shining brightly from the east. The sun's rays shone on an enormous decorated archway made from white jade, on which written in gold letters were the words 'For the Benefit of Common People'. The gold coating of the letters reflected the sunlight and bursts of gold glittered everywhere. When people saw this, a feeling of profound respect would blossom in their hearts.

Linghu Chong thought, "There's no one in Wulin who could setup this kind of fanfare like Dongfang Bubai. Even Shaolin and Songshan wouldn't be able to follow this. As for Huashan and Hengshan, they lack even further. He's really a learned man, unlike other crude and ordinary heroes in the realm."

Ren Woxing softly muttered, "For the benefit of common people, hng!"

Shangguan Yun called out in a clear voice, "Subordinate from White Tiger Hall, Elder Shangguan Yun, has received Chief's order and has come to pay a visit to Chief."

Four people came out of a stone house from their right and walked toward them. They were all wearing purple gowns. One of them said, "Congratulations Elder Shangguan for completing a great service. How come Elder Jia didn't come?"

"Elder Jia died for the cause and has repaid Chief's kindness," Shangguan Yun replied.

"That's how it is. Then Elder Shangguan will surely be promoted," that person replied.

"If Chief promotes me, then I wouldn't dare forget Brother's help," Shangguan Yun said.

When that person heard this promise of a bribe, a smile crept into his eyes. "We should thank you first!" He gave Linghu Chong a glance and laughingly said, "Is this the little kid that Young Lady Ren admires? I thought he would have a face like Pan An or Song Yu, but I guess I was wrong. Green Dragon Hall's Elder Shangguan, please come through here."

"Chief hasn't promoted me yet so don't say this too early. If Chief or General Yang heard this, then we'd be in big trouble."

That person stuck his tongue out and then led the way for them. They passed underneath the decorated archway and walked through a perfectly straight slab of road leading to a big door. After they went through the big door, another two people in purple gowns welcomed the five of them into



the reception hall. One of them said, "General Yang wants to see you so just wait here."

"Yes!" Shangguan Yun acknowledged and put both of his arms besides his body. Even after a long time, that 'General Yang' still hadn't come out yet, but Shangguan Yun just stood there respectfully waiting. Linghu Chong thought, "Elder Shangguan's position in the sect isn't low, but once he comes up the cliff, everyone looks down on him and treats him just like a servant. Even the servants here seem to have more power than him. What kind of person is that General Yang? Most likely, he's that Yang Lianting person. Before he came to be a general, he was just some ordinary servant doing some trifle things. But now the White Tiger Hall's elder actually has to wait respectfully for his arrival. Dongfang Bubai has really gone too far!"

After another long wait, footsteps were heard coming towards them. From the sound of the steps, it seemed that the person had no internal energy at all. With a cough, a person emerged from behind the screen. Linghu Chong took a peek and saw that this person was around thirty years old and was wearing a red jujube satin gown. He appeared tall and strong, and his face was full of beard. In appearance, he really looked like a healthy and powerful martial artist.

Linghu Chong thought, "Yingying said that Dongfang Bubai is very pampering towards this guy, and she also said that the relationship between these two is shady. I always thought that he would look like a girly and pretty man, who would've thought he'd be this big and burly fellow. This is really outside my imagination. Could it be that he's not Yang Lianting?" He then heard that person said, "Elder Shangguan, you successfully accomplished your goal of capturing Linghu Chong. Chief will definitely be happy with this." His voice was really deep and was pleasant to hear.

Shangguan Yun bowed to him and said, "That's all because of Chief's good fortune and General Yang's thorough advice. Subordinate is merely carrying out Chief's order."

Linghu Chong inwardly felt strange. "This person must surely be Yang Lianting!"

Yang Lianting walked to the side of the stretcher and took a look at Linghu Chong's face. Linghu Chong's eyes were unfocused, his mouth hung slightly open, and he was wearing a stupefied expression while his whole body was bloodied as though he had received some heavy injuries. Yang Lianting asked, "Is this almost dead person Linghu Chong? Are you sure you got the right person?"

"Subordinate saw with my own eyes when he took the leadership of Heng-Shan School, so it couldn't be wrong. In addition, he gave Elder Jia three stabs in his major acupoints and also injured Subordinate's two palms. My injuries are serious, it's likely that it won't be healed in one and a half year," Shangguan Yun reported.

Yang Lianting laughed, "You beat up Young Lady Ren's beloved until he's like this. Be careful, she'll come and kill you."

"Subordinate is loyal to Chief. I don't care about other people's hatred towards me. It's Subordinate's wish to be loyal to Chief till death; then my whole family would've been honoured," Shangguan Yun replied.

"Very good, very good. I must tell Chief about your loyalty, Chief will definitely heap you with gifts. The Wind and Thunder Hall's elder has betrayed Chief and sowed confusion. Have you known about this?"

"Subordinate doesn't know the details, but would like to consult General about this. If Chief or General has an order, subordinate will put my life on the line to do it. I will go through fire and water and I wouldn't balk at a thousand deaths," Shangguan Yun said.

Yang Lianting sat on a chair and let out a long sigh. "This old guy Tong Baixiong, he's always relied on Chief's kindheartedness. He regards himself highly and has always looked down on other people. In the last few years, he's been secretly plotting to rebel with some of his friends. I've seen

clues of this for a long time already. Who would've thought that he becomes even more and more of an outlaw as days go by. He even went to collude with that sect rebel Ren Woxing; how absurd!"

"He actually went to... went to collude with that Ren?" Shangguan Yun's voice was trembling, it was obvious that he was greatly shocked.

"Elder Shangguan, why are you so afraid? That Ren Woxing doesn't have three heads and six arms. In the days gone by, Chief played him till he was doing everything that Chief asked him to. It was only because of Chief's kindness that he's still alive today. If he doesn't come to Dark Wood Cliff then it doesn't matter, but if he dares to come here, wouldn't it be just like slaughtering a chicken?"

"Yes, yes," Shangguan Yun agreeing with him. "But how did Tong Baixiong collude with him?"

Yang Lianting explained, "Tong Baixiong secretly met with Ren Woxing, and the two of them had a long chat for many hours. Another traitor of the sect was also there, Xiang Wentian. Someone saw them having the meeting. What could he be talking about with these two traitors for so long? It must've been a secret meeting to rebel against Chief. When Tong Baixiong returned to Dark Wood Cliff, I asked him whether this meeting happened. He actually admitted it!"

Shangguan Yun said, "He already admitted it then naturally he didn't do anything wrong."

Yang Lianting said, "I asked him why didn't he go and report to Chief after meeting Ren Woxing. He said: 'Brother Ren came to me to have a chat. He regards me as a friend, I also regard him as a friend, why can't friends have a chat with each other?' I asked him: 'Ren Woxing has returned to Jianghu and he's intending to attack Chief. You already know about this point. Since he's not going to be polite to Chief, how can you still regard him as a friend?' His reply was even more ridiculous, damn him, this old chap actually said: 'I'm

afraid it's Chief who's being impolite to other people, it's not necessarily other people who's being impolite to Chief!"

"This old chap is talking nonsense! Chief's righteousness is as high as the sky and he treats his friends very generously, how can he be impolite to people? That naturally is being ungrateful to Chief." When Yang Lianting heard these words, of course he believed that the word 'Chief' was referring to Dongfang Bubai. But Shangguan Yun was actually praising Ren Woxing. Linghu Chong and party then heard him continue, "Since Subordinate has already vowed my loyalty and devotion to Chief, if I heard any daring rats to speak rudely about Chief, I would never let them go." These words were actually aimed to scold Yang Lianting, but how would he know? Yang Lianting laughed and said, "Very good, if all the brothers in the sect can be like Elder Shangguan and be very loyal to Chief, what else do we need to worry about? You've worked hard already, go down and take a rest."

Shangguan Yun was startled. "Subordinate would really like to meet Chief. Every time Subordinate sees Chief, I would feel greatly vigorous and would be able to do my duty with enthusiasm. It'd be as if I had cultivated my internal energy for ten years."

Yang Lianting tastelessly laughed and said, "Chief is very busy, I'm afraid he doesn't have time to see you."

Shangguan Yun put his hand into his bosom and when he took it out, there were more than ten pearls on his palm. He walked forward a few steps and whispered, "General Yang, when subordinate went on the mission this time, I managed to get these eighteen pearls. I'd like to give these as a present. I hope that General would let me see Chief. If Chief likes them, maybe he would promote me and then heap me with gifts."

Yang Lianting smiled falsely. "We're brothers, why do we need to be so polite? Thank you very much." Then he lowered his voice and said, "When I see Chief, I'll put in a

good word for you and advise him to promote you to be the elder of the Green Dragon Hall."

Shangguan Yun bowed again and again. Then he said, "If I get promoted, Shangguan Yun would never forget Chief's and General's kindness."

Yang Lianting said, "Wait here till Chief is free, then he'll ask you to come in."

"Yes, yes, yes!" Shangguan Yun excitedly replied. He then closed his hand around the pearls and retreated a few steps. Yang Lianting stood up and in a grand manner went inside. After another long time, a purple-gowned servant came out. He stood erect and in a clear voice announced, "Refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, the just and wise Chief commands: Elder Shangguan Yun of White Tiger Hall, take the prisoner and enter."

Shangguan Yun said, "Thank you for Chief's grace. I wish Chief a long life and to unify the Jianghu." He then swung his left hand across asking the purple gown servant to lead the way. Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying carried Linghu Chong behind them. As they walked in, the veranda above them was full of warriors armed with spears. They entered three iron gates and arrived at a long corridor whose sides were lined up by hundreds of warriors. Each of the warriors carried a long sabre in his hand and had crossed the sabres above their heads. Shangguan Yun and his party bent their waists and lowered their heads as they walked along the corridor. If any of these hundreds of sabres suddenly chopped down then they would surely lose their heads. Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian had gone through more than a hundred battles and they wouldn't have even given these warriors a thought, but to be able to see Dongfang Bubai, they had to endure these insults first. They felt vehemence in their hearts. Linghu Chong thought, "Dongfang Bubai treats his subordinates so rudely. How can they remain loyal to him? His subordinates haven't rebelled yet only because

they're afraid of him. But if Dongfang Bubai looks down on this people, how can he not be defeated?"

After they went through the sabre path, they arrived at a doorway covered by a curtain. Shangguan Yun parted the curtain and went inside. Suddenly, flickering of lights was seen as eight spears were thrust at him from everywhere. Four spears were aimed at the front of his chest while the other four spears were aimed at the back of his body, the spears stopped inches from touching him. Linghu Chong immediately surmised the situation and thus extended his hand to grab the long sword stored underneath the bandage on his thigh. But he saw Shangguan Yun just standing there motionless while calling out clearly, "Elder Shangguan Yun from the White Tiger Hall is here to pay his respect to the refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, the just and wise Chief!"

Someone from inside the hall shouted, "Enter!"

The eight spearmen immediately retreated to form two lines on either side. Linghu Chong only then understood. Originally, when these eight spearmen stabbed out with their spears, they were just trying to frighten them. If the people coming into the hall had bad intentions, when they saw the eight spears being thrust towards them, they would immediately draw their weapons to fight back. Then the betrayal would've been exposed.

They entered a big hall and Linghu Chong thought, "What a long hall!" The width of the hall was only around thirty feet, but the depth of the hall was around three hundred feet. At the end of the hall, an old man with a long beard was seated. That person was Dongfang Bubai.

There was no window inside the hall, and only candles illuminated the inside of the hall. On both sides of Dongfang Bubai's seat were two flickering oil lamps. At the distance they were at, they couldn't see Dongfang Bubai's appearance clearly. Shangguan Yun knelt at the bottom of the stairs and said clearly, "Chief is a refined scholar and kind-hearted

warrior; just and wise, flourishes the Divine Sect, and benefits the common people. Subordinate Elder Shangguan Yun of White Tiger Hall pays his respect to Chief.”

The purple-gowned servant standing besides Dongfang Bubai shouted, “How come your subordinates aren’t kneeling when paying their respects to Chief?”

Ren Woxing thought, “The moment hasn’t arrived yet. What’s the harm in kneeling to you? Wait until I pull your muscle out and skin you alive.” At this thought, he immediately lowered his head and kneeled down. When Xiang Wentian and Yingying saw him kneeling down, they also knelt down. Shangguan Yun said, “Subordinate’s men have always longed to see Chief. Today, Chief has finally bestowed us with this kindness. This is really a kindness that has favoured eighteen generations of their ancestors. Once they saw Chief, they were so pleased that they forgot to kneel down. Please forgive them.”

Yang Lianting was standing besides Dongfang Bubai. He said, “Report to Chief how Elder Jia died for the sect.”

Shangguan Yun replied, “Elder Jia and Subordinate were carrying out Chief’s order. In the last few years, we both have been promoted by Chief. This is a big kindness that’s hard to repay. So this time when Chief put this heavy responsibility on both of us, we both were feeling very vigorous. We felt that since Chief instructed us to do this, and also because of Chief’s foolproof plan, no matter who’s been assigned to capture Linghu Chong, they would never fail. Since Chief sent the two of us, we had no concern whatsoever...” Linghu Chong was lying on the stretcher and his mind was secretly scolding, “Disgusting, disgusting! Shangguan Yun’s nickname has the word ‘hero’ in it. But he can say this without his face turning red or his ears turning red, I didn’t know there’s such a shameless person in this world.”

At this moment, he heard someone shouting from behind them, “Brother Dongfang, was it really you who sent people to capture me?” This person’s voice sounded old but his

inner energy was abundant. After he had spoken these words, the echo from his voice reverberated throughout the hall showing just how powerful he was. He guessed that this person was the Wind and Thunder Hall's elder, Tong Baixiong.



# Notes

[[←1](#)]

Ren Woxing means “go anywhere I wish” in Chinese.

[←2]

Jin-Jing is an acupoint.

[←3]

Dan-Tian is an acupoint, but is normally used to refer to the lower abdomen region where inner energy can be stored at.

[←4]

Catty is a unit of weight used in Southeast Asia, especially a Chinese measure equal to 500 grams (approximately 1.1 pounds).

[←5]

Dan-Zhong is an acupoint in the middle of one's chest by the Solar Plexus.

[←6]

Your granny is a swear word that this officer likes to use

[←7]

Shi Tai means a nun who is already old but it can also be a title to a nun who holds a high position in the temple. For lack of a better word in English, I'm leaving it as Shi Tai.

[ ←8]

DongFang BiBai means DongFang is defeated, whereas his original name  
DongFang BuBai means DongFang undefeated



[←9]

Play of words on her name

[←10]

A" bucket of rice" means good for nothing

[←11]

It's bad luck for someone to jump over your head

[←12]

"Ma Ge Guo Shi" is a phrase that means "to die in the battlefield". When this is translated literally, it means "corpse wrapped in horse's skin". But what Linghu Chong said "Ma Ge Li Shi" has no meaning. He deliberately replaced the word "Guo" with "Li".

[←13]

He's telling Dingjing Shi Tai which characters his name "Tiande" use.

[←14]

This means that she'll be easy pickings

[←15]

Ren Woxing: the Wo in his name mean I, Ren Nixing: the Ni in this name means You.

[←16]

This is a 3rd edition addition. added from Athena's post.



[←17]

The words in Chinese are rearranged to come up with the second interpretation.

[←18]

Gao Kexin said "Dong Xi" which literally means "east west". But these two words together means "object".

[←19]

: A visit box is a wooden box containing the visitor's calling card which is given to the host's servants at the gate to be presented to the host.

[←20]

Dragon Spring or Longquan in Chinese is the name of a city in the Zhejiang province. Near that city is a valley that has creeks running through it that were used by Ou Yezi to forge some legendary swords. That valley is called Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley. If you'd like to find out more, look at "Legend of the White Hair Demoness" chapter 11 translation by Fairie Queene.)

[←21]

Blood letter is a letter written in blood

[←22]

The word “gentleman” consists of two Chinese characters. By adding an extra character in front of it, it becomes the word “hypocrite”. That’s the connection between these two words

[←23]

Peeling Leather means to kill people

[←24]

Flood Dragon is a mythical creature capable of invoking storm and flood.



[←25]

"Like thunder entering the ears" is an idiom that means "have long resounded in my ears"

[←26]

Stinking ugly in Chinese contains the character "eight" in the phrase. But it doesn't translate well in English here with the joke.

## [←27]

Some Chinese lessons to understand the next part. For this case, the Chief here is called "meng zhu" ( 蒙 主 ). Meng means alliance ( 蒙 ); Zhu means lord/master ( 主 ). The character "meng" consists of two characters "ming" ( 明 ) on top and "min" ( 皿 ) at the bottom. Ming means clear/bright; Min means shallow container.

Now, when a downwards-left curved character stroke called "pie" is added to the character "min" ( 皿 ), then it becomes "xue" ( 血 ). Xue means blood.

[←28]

Peachtree Trunk Fairy misheard the pronunciation so he thought Peachtree Branch Fairy said "Less a bit" and not "Less a "pie""

[←29]

This is still play on words in Chinese

[←30]

This means to fortify the defence works and to leave nothing usable to the invading enemy.

[←31]

Shi zhu is a term of address used by monks or nuns referring to a believer in Buddhism.

[←32]

Ren Woxing's name means "To do what I please". He's saying Nixing which means "To do what you want me to do"



[←33]

I took part of this translation from Athena's post on 3rd edition changes in SPW

[←34]

A Chinese idiom which literally has the meaning 'Oil Mouth Slippery Tongue' means 'Sweet talk without being sincere'. The joke on the oil is connected to this.

[←35]

This saying means 'would rather have a low but independent position than hold a high position under the control of others'

[←36]

On this tablet is usually written the name of the deceased and his/her title.

[←37]

Red pocket is a red coloured paper bag that contains money. Usually the elders give this to youngsters. But as soon as you're married, then you're counted as one of the elders and are expected to give out red pockets during the New Year. [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en\\_e...ntent\\_43896.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_e...ntent_43896.htm) has a paper cut example.

[←38]

Breaking the ground means to start a building project

[←39]

In the third edition, this person was changed to Ding Mian. This is from Athena's post on this change: Ding Mian (martial arts brother of Zuo Lengchan) is the one who leads a group of people to prevent Linghu Chong from assuming leadership of the Northern Hengshan School. In the previous editions this was Yue Hou (Great Yin and Yang Palms). Yue Hou was a rather decent chap, so I think this change was to retain the image of him being a rather decent bloke. Ding Mian is famous for being a butcher, so humiliating him was not such a big deal.

[←40]

Long live literal translation from Chinese is 'Thousand Year Ten Thousand Years'.



**The Smiling,  
Proud  
Wanderer:  
Volume 4**

**Jin Yong**

# **The Smiling, Proud Wanderer**

(笑傲江湖 / Xiào Ào Jiānghú)

## **Volume 4**

by

**Jin Yong**

### **Translators:**

Lanny Lin

Pokit

Bliss

### **Editor:**

HHaung

# Contents

[Chapter 31: Embroidering](#)

[Chapter 32: School Merger](#)

[Chapter 33: Sword Fight](#)

[Chapter 34: Snatching the Leadership](#)

[Chapter 35: Vengeance](#)

[Chapter 36: Grief](#)

[Chapter 37: Forcing Marriage](#)

[Chapter 38: Annihilation](#)

[Chapter 39: No Treaty](#)

[Chapter 40: Harmony](#)

# **Chapter 31: Embroidering**

**Translated by: Pokit and Bliss**

**Edited by: Hhaung.**



**Dongfang Unbeatable threw himself by the side of Yang Lianting. He picked him up and put him on the bed gently. Taking off his shoes and socks, then pulling the blanket over him, he behaved like a wife taking care of her husband.**

Yang Lianting coldly said, "Tong Baixiong, how can you shout like that at the Hall of Refined Kindness? Why aren't you kneeling down when your Chief is right in front of you? How do you dare not to sing praises to Chief?"

Tong Baixiong looked up to the sky and laughed loudly. "When Brother Dongfang and I became friends, where were you, little kid? At the time when Brother Dongfang and I escaped death and went through all those hardships, you weren't even born yet! You dare to talk to me?"

Linghu Chong turned his head and finally was able to see the face of Tong Baixiong clearly. He has white hair which was wildly out of place and a bushy silver beard. His face was twitching with anger, his eyes were wide opened, and the blood on his face was already darkened and hard. All these created a very scary facial expression. Both of his arms and legs were shackled with long chains that dragged behind him and rattled loudly as he spoke. He was speaking passionately, waving his arms around and the iron chain accompanied his angry speech with a loud 'zheng, zheng' noise.

Ren Woxing was still kneeling down and staying still, but hearing the noise the chain made, he remembered the time when he was locked up at the bottom of the West Lake. He couldn't control his anger anymore and his body was now shaking with anger, and he really wanted to start destroying things. But he then heard Yang Lianting said, "You're very arrogant to be so rude in front of our Chief. You secretly colluded with that traitor Ren Woxing. Do you know your sin now?"

"Chief Ren is the former chief of our sect," Tong Baixiong said. "When he had an incurable illness, he retreated into

seclusion and gave the leadership of the sect to Brother Dongfang. How can you say that he's a traitor to our sect? Brother Dongfang, tell us clearly: how did Chief Ren rebel, how did he betray our sect?"

"After Ren Woxing cured his illness, he should've immediately returned to our sect. But he instead went to Shaolin Temple, and bonded together with the headmasters of Shaolin, Wu Dang, Songshan and many other schools. Wouldn't you say that's betraying our sect? Why didn't he come to pay his respect to Chief and listen respectfully to Chief's order?" Yang Lianting replied instead.

Tong Baixiong laughed. "Chief Ren used to be the superior of Brother Dongfang, and his experience in martial art is vast, so he's not necessarily under Brother Dongfang. Brother Dongfang, isn't this right?"

Yang Lianting shouted loudly, "Don't rely on your seniority here. Our Chief is very generous to his subordinate, and he would never stoop down to your level. If you deeply regretted your fault, then tomorrow in front of the assembly altar, you can tell all our brothers about your fault, your assurance to rectify your misdeed, and swear

your loyalty to Chief. Then maybe Chief would spare your life this time. Otherwise, you know what is going to happen to you."

Tong Baixiong laughed. "I'm close to eighty years old already. I'm already tired of living, what consequence am I afraid of?"

Yang Lianting shouted, "Bring in those people!"

The servants in purple clothes answered, "Yes!" and then they heard the sound of chains clunking as more than ten people were brought into the hall. There were men, women, and a few children in the group. When Tong Baixiong saw this, his face changed colour and he used his qi to shout, "Yang Lianting, a gentleman is responsible for what he has done. Why are you bringing my grandson here?" His shout shook the eardrums of everyone in the hall.

Linghu Chong, looking in the direction towards the dais where Dongfang Bubai was sitting, saw that Dongfang Bubai shook when he heard this shout. So he thought to himself, "This person still has some conscience left. His heart was still moved when seeing how worried Tong Baixiong is."

Yang Lianting laughed and said, "What's the third teaching of our Chief? Say it out loud for us to hear!"

Tong Baixiong just uttered a few 'Pei' vehemently and didn't reply back. Yang Lianting said, "Among the Tong family, anyone who knows of Chief's third teaching, say it out loud."

One boy who is around ten years old said, "Refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, the just and wise Chief's third teaching: 'You must be fierce towards your enemy and behead the source of trouble. Men, women, old, and young, leave no one behind.'"

Yang Lianting praised, "Very good, very good! Little baby, you remember all ten of Chief's teaching?"

The boy answered, "I remember them all. If I don't study the teachings for one day, I wouldn't be able to eat or sleep. Once I've read Chief's teachings, my martial art greatly advances and I have a lot of strength to fight."

Yang Lianting laughed. "That is right. And who taught you these words?"

"My father taught me."

Yang Lianting pointed at Tong Baixiong and asked, "Who is he?"

"He is my grandfather."

"Your grandfather doesn't read the teaching of our Chief, doesn't listen to Chief's words, and has betrayed our Chief. What do you think we should do?"

"Grandfather's wrong. Everyone must study Chief's teaching and listen to what Chief says."

Yang Lianting said to Tong Baixiong, "Your grandson is only a ten years old baby, yet he knows what to do. While you're already so old, how come you're so foolish?"



Tong Baixiong said, "I only exchanged a few words with those two people, Ren and Xiang. They wanted me to betray Chief, but I didn't agree to their proposal. When Tong Baixiong says one then it'll be one, two then it'll be two. I would never wrong other people." He saw that all of his family was being held hostage so his speech was getting softer as he spoke.

Yang Lianting sighed and in a regretful tone said, "If you had said this earlier, then this wouldn't have become so troublesome. So do you know your fault now?"

"I wasn't wrong. I've never abandoned our sect and I have never betrayed our Chief."

Yang Lianting sighed. "Since you don't want to admit your fault, then I can't help you anymore. Bring his family down and don't give them a grain of rice or even a mouthful of water from today."

A few servants in purple gowns responded, "Yes!" as they took the family away. Tong Baixiong shouted, "Wait!" Then he said to Yang Lianting, "Alright, I admit my fault. It was I who was wrong. Chief, I beg for your forgiveness."

Even though he had admitted his fault, his eyes were still burning as if they were about to spout fire. Yang Lianting smiled coldly, "What did you say a moment ago? You said that when Chief and you experienced hardships, I wasn't even born, isn't this right?"

Tong Baixiong held back his anger and said, "I was wrong."

"You were wrong? That came out from you too easily. How come you aren't kneeling down in front of Chief?"

"Chief and I have become sworn brothers sometime in the past. For tens of years, we have been standing and sitting down as equal." He suddenly raised his voice, "Brother Dongfang, you see that your older brother is being tortured, how come you're not saying anything? If you want your brother to kneel down to you, that's very easy to do. You only have to say a word, and your brother will die for you without

blinking an eye." Dongfang Bubai just sat still. All of sudden, the big hall was quiet. Everyone was staring at Dongfang Bubai, waiting for him to speak. But even after some time had passed, he still didn't say a word. "Brother Dongfang, for the past few years, it's been very difficult for me to see you. You locked yourself up and practiced the Sunflower Manual assiduously. Did you know that there were so many changes in our sect and that danger is just around the corner?" Dongfang Bubai just sat silently without uttering a single sound. "If Brother wants to kill me or torture me, I couldn't care less. But if you ruin the hundreds of years' power and prestige of our sect, then you will become a great sinner. Why aren't you talking? You fire deviated while practicing martial art so that you can't talk, is this right?"

Yang Lianting shouted, "Nonsense! Kneel down!" Two servants in purple also shouted as they flew towards Tong Baixiong and kicked towards the back of his knees to force him to kneel. But their legs were broken instead with loud cracking sounds. They fell down on the ground and fresh blood spouted out from their mouths. Tong Baixiong said, "Brother Dongfang, I want to hear you say something so that dying would be sweet. You haven't spoken for 3 years, and all the brothers in the sect are getting suspicious."

Yang Lianting indignantly interjected, "What suspicion?"

"The suspicion that Chief has fallen into someone's plot and been given a muting drug. How come he doesn't speak? How come he doesn't speak?" Tong Baixiong spoke loudly.

Yang Lianting laughed coldly. "Chief's every word is precious. Why would he waste his breath and speak to a traitor like you? Guards, take him down the cliff!"

Eight servants in purple answered his call and came out. Tong Baixiong loudly said, "Brother Dongfang, I want to take a look at you. Have you been hurt so badly that you can't speak?" He waved his arms about and the iron chains on them scattered around. With his two legs dragging the iron chains, he charged towards Dongfang Bubai. When the eight

servants saw how powerful he was, they were afraid to get near him.

Yang Lianting shouted, "Capture him, capture him!"

The warriors outside the hall shouted their battle cries but stayed just outside the door because they didn't dare to enter the hall. There was a strict rule in the sect which stated that for anyone to step a foot inside the Hall of Refined Kindness while carrying a weapon was an unpardonable offence that deserved execution. Dongfang Bubai stood up and turned around to go out through the back of the hall.

Tong Baixiong called out, "Brother Dongfang, don't go!" as he quickened his steps. However, with the iron chains on his legs preventing him from walking fast and his heart anxious with worry, he stumbled and fell forward. But he took advantage of the situation by somersaulting forward and then charged towards Dongfang Bubai. He was around a hundred feet away from Dongfang Bubai when Yang Lianting shouted, "Daring traitor is going to stab our Chief! Warriors, quickly come up the hall and capture this traitor!"

Ren Woxing noticed that even though Dongfang Bubai was dawdling in his escape, Tong Baixiong was still quite far away from him. He also wouldn't be able to catch up to him so he pulled out three copper coins, moved his qi to his arm, and threw them at Dongfang Bubai. Yingying shouted, "Let's Move!"

Linghu Chong leapt up and pulled his long sword out from inside the bandage. Xiang Wentian pulled out the weapons from inside the wooden poles of the stretcher and gave them to Ren Woxing and Yingying. He then gave a mighty pull on the rope underneath the stretcher which turned out to be a soft whip.

The four of them immediately used their qinggong and charged up the hall. All of sudden, Dongfang Bubai screamed as blood poured out of the top of his head where he was hit by a copper coin. When Ren Woxing threw those three coins, his distance from Dongfang Bubai was quite far away, so the

power of the coin was already exhausted when it hit Dongfang Bubai's head and thus only caused a light external injury. But Dongfang Bubai was praised to be the number one martial artist in the whole world, and unexpectedly he wasn't even able to avoid this little coin. This didn't make sense to anyone there.

Ren Woxing started laughing and he called out, "This Dongfang Bubai is a fake!"

Xiang Wentian slashed out with his whip and coiled it around both of Yang Lianting's legs. He then pulled his whip taut and dragged Yang Lianting to the ground. Dongfang Bubai covered his face up as he ran away. Linghu Chong moved to one side to rush forward and cut off his escape path. "Stop!" he shouted as he pointed his long sword towards Dongfang Bubai. But who would've thought that Dongfang Bubai would be unable to stop and would keep on running towards the point of the sword? Linghu Chong hastily withdrew his sword and sent his left palm out to strike him lightly. Dongfang Bubai immediately fell down on the ground with his face up.

By that time, Ren Woxing had also arrived. He quickly grabbed the back of Dongfang Bubai's neck and dragged him towards the hall entrance. In a clear and loud voice, he announced, "Everyone, listen! This chap is a fake Dongfang Bubai who's trying to bring disaster on my Divine Sun Moon Sect. Everyone look at his face clearly."

From the appearance of this person, everyone could see that he actually resembled Dongfang Bubai very closely. But his frightened face was very different from the usual calm and confident attitude of Dongfang Bubai. Seeing this, all the warriors were greatly surprised and shocked that they were unable to utter anything.

Ren Woxing shouted, "What's your name? If you don't speak clearly, I'll crush your head."

That person was quaking from fear, and he tremblingly stuttered, "Ser... ser... servant...is called... called... called..."

Xiang Wentian had already sealed many acupoints on Yang Lianting's body and had also dragged him to the entrance of the hall. He barked, "What's his name?"

Yang Lianting replied without any fear, "Who are you to dare question me? I know you are the traitor Xiang Wentian. The Divine Sun Moon Sect has already expelled you from the sect, why did you come back to Dark Wood Cliff for?"

Xiang Wentian smiled coldly. "I came back to Dark Wood Cliff to take care of your treachery!" After he said this, his right palm hacked down and broke Yang Lianting's left shin bone. Yang Lianting's martial art was just average but showing no pain, he scolded back, "Why don't you just kill me instead of torturing me? Is this what heroes do?"

Xiang Wentian laughed and said, "Do you think things would be that easy?" His palm descended again and with a 'ka' sound, Yang Lianting's right shin bone was now broken. Then, with his left hand, Xiang Wentian shoved Yang Lianting to the ground.

Both of Yang Lianting's legs had been broken so when they hit the ground, the broken bones on his legs broke the skin and pierced upwards. The severity of the pain caused by this would be unimaginable. But Yang Lianting unexpectedly didn't utter a single word.

Xiang Wentian gave a thumbs up to him and praised, "Good man! I won't torture you any more." He then lightly punched the fake Dongfang Bubai's stomach and asked, "What is your real name?" The fake Dongfang Bubai screamed loudly and answered, "Ser... servant... is called... called... Bao... Bao..."

"Your surname is Bao, is that right?" Xiang Wentian said.

"Yes... Yes... Yes... Bao... Bao... Bao..." He kept on mumbling for some time but never actually uttered what his given name was.

Suddenly, everyone could smell a stinky odour and saw that there was water flowing from underneath this fake

Dongfang Bubai's pants. This fake Dongfang Bubai was so scared that he had actually urinated in his pants.

"We can't be delayed; finding Dongfang Bubai is our most important thing to do!" Ren Woxing decided. He then lifted Bao and bellowed, "You've all seen clearly now. Our sect is infested by the like of this guy who is pretending to be Dongfang Bubai. We must find out the truth. I am your true Chief, Ren Woxing. Do you recognise me?"

All of the sect warriors were youths who were only in their twenties and had never seen his face before, so none of them recognised him. After Dongfang Bubai became the sect's Chief, all of his trusted aides wanted to be in his good book so they never mentioned the past matter of Chief Ren. That was why these warriors had never even heard of Ren Woxing's name. On the other hand, they thought that even though the Divine Sun Moon Sect had been in existence for hundreds of years, Dongfang Bubai had always been the Chief. They just looked at each other not daring to utter a word.

Shangguan Yun said loudly, "Dongfang Bubai was probably killed by Yang Lianting and his cohorts. Chief Ren is our sect's chief. From now on, everyone must be loyal to Chief Ren." After he said this, he knelt down in front of Ren Woxing and said, "Subordinate pays his respect to Chief Ren. Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu!"

Those warriors knew that Shangguan Yun was a high-ranking officer in the sect. When they now saw him paying his respect to Ren Woxing -- after witnessing for themselves how Chief Dongfang was replaced by a fake, how their powerful and awe-inspiring Yang Lianting got his legs broken, thrown to the ground, and couldn't fight back at all -- tens of those warriors immediately knelt towards Ren Woxing and said, "Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu!"

The rest of the warriors immediately followed suit. Having said 'Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu' hundreds of

times, they unwittingly used the same words to address Ren Woxing.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly taking pride in himself. He then said, "You must strictly guard the entrances to Dark Wood Cliff and don't let anyone go up or down from the Cliff." The warriors acknowledged the order together.

By then, Xiang Wentian had already ordered the servants in purple to release Tong Baixiong. Tong Baixiong was really worried about the safety of Dongfang Bubai so he grabbed Yang Lianting by his neck and shouted, "You... You... You must've killed my Brother Dongfang. You... You..." He was feeling very agitated, his voice was choking, and teardrops started to fall on his cheeks.

Yang Lianting just closed his eyes and ignored him. Tong Baixiong gave him a whack on his ear and yelled, "What happened to my Brother Dongfang?"

Xiang Wentian hastily said, "Lighten your hits!" But it was too late. Even though Tong Baixiong had only used around thirty percent of his power, Yang Lianting was already unconscious from the slapping. Tong Baixiong shook Yang Lianting's body. But Yang Lianting's eyes were all white and looked as if he had died.

Ren Woxing said to the purple gown servants, "Who knows of Dongfang Bubai's whereabouts? Quickly report then I'll heap you with gifts." He asked three times, but nobody answered. Suddenly, Ren Woxing's heart turned cold. While he was being imprisoned underneath the West Lake, besides practising his martial art, he was also imagining how to torture Dongfang Bubai once he had escaped from that prison. But today on top of Dark Wood Cliff, all he found was the fake one. It seemed as if Dongfang Bubai had died sometime ago. Otherwise, judging on Dongfang Bubai's subtlety and martial art, how could this Yang Lianting manage to commit these evil acts and order someone to pretend to be Dongfang Bubai? What was the use of torturing Yang Lianting and this idiot Bao?

He looked at the servants in purple gown scattered throughout the hall. Some of them looked completely terrified, some looked frightened and confused, and there were some who appeared cunning and deceitful. Ren Woxing was extremely disappointed and was feeling impatient. He shouted, "You chaps, you must know this was a fake Dongfang Bubai, and cooperated with Yang Lianting in deceiving the brothers in the sect. These are unpardonable sins that deserved deaths!"

His body swayed as he rushed towards them. 'Pa, Pa, Pa, Pa'. These four soft sounds were heard as four servants in purple gowns were killed without being able to utter a single word. The rest of the servants were startled and they started to scream in fear and ran for their lives. Ren Woxing laughed fiercely and bellowed, "Escaping! Escaping where?" He picked up the iron shackles on the ground which were originally used to shackle Tong Baixiong, and tossed them at a cluster of people. Blood and flesh flew all over the place as seven or eight people were killed. Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, "I will not let anyone who followed Dongfang Bubai live!"

Yingying saw her father was acting rather strangely, like he was mad, so she shouted at him, "Daddy!" She ran to him and pulled on his hand. Suddenly, one of the servants came out and knelt down. "Reporting to Chief. Dongfang Bubai... Dongfang Bubai didn't die!"

Jubilant, Ren Woxing ran up to that servant, grabbed his shoulders and asked, "Dongfang Bubai didn't die?"

"Yes! AH!" the servant fainted after screaming in pain. In his excitement, Ren Woxing had actually used too much strength and broke both of that servant's shoulders. Ren Woxing shook the servant's body a few times but he didn't wake up.

Ren Woxing then turned his head to the other servants and shouted, "Where is Dongfang Bubai? Quickly lead the way! If you're delaying me, I'll kill you all!" One servant knelt



down and said, "Reporting to Chief. The location of Dongfang Bubai is a secret and only Yang Lianting knows how to open the secret pathway. If we wake this Yang traitor up, he will lead Chief to where Dongfang Bubai is."

Ren Woxing shouted, "Quickly bring cold water!"

These servants in purple gown were pretty clever. Five of them immediately flew out of the hall, but only three people came back carrying bowls of cold water, as the other two had run away. They poured all three bowls of cold water over Yang Lianting's head. He slowly woke up and opened his eyes. Xiang Wentian said, "I admire your braveness so I won't torture you any more. Now, all the paths going up and down from Dark Wood Cliff have been blocked so there's no way for Dongfang Bubai to escape unless he has a couple of wings to fly out. Quickly lead us to find him, why would a gentleman hide his face and only reveal his tail? Let's quickly decide this matter, so everyone can be happy!"

Yang Lianting smiled derisively. "Chief Dongfang is matchless in this world. It's very good that you all want to go to your death. Alright, I'll lead you to him."

Xiang Wentian said to Shangguan Yun, "Brother Shangguan, let's carry Yang Lianting to see Dongfang Bubai." He lifted Yang Lianting and dumped him on top of the stretcher. Shangguan Yun answered, "Yes!" and lifted the stretcher together with Xiang Wentian. Yang Lianting instructed, "Go inside!" Xiang Wentian and Shangguan Yun carried him in front to lead the way while Ren Woxing, Linghu Chong, Yingying, and Tong Baixiong followed behind them.

They went to the back of the Hall of Refined Kindness and passed through a long corridor before arriving at a flower garden. They then entered a small stone house west of the garden. Yang Lianting said, "Push the left wall."

When Tong Baixiong pushed the wall, it actually turned around and revealed a secret doorway. Inside there was another metal door facing them. Yang Lianting pulled out a key and handed it over to Tong Baixiong. Tong Baixiong

opened the door and discovered an underground tunnel beyond that door. They all headed underground. On both sides of the tunnel were oil lamps flickering dimly. Ren Woxing thought, "That bastard Dongfang Bubai locked me up under the West Lake. Who would've thought that he gets the same retribution and got himself locked up as well. This tunnel isn't any better than the one in Plum Manor on Mount Gu."

But after they had made a few turns, suddenly there was an open space in front of them and they could see the bright sky. Instantly, the fragrance of flowers assaulted their noses and they felt invigorated. As they came out of the tunnel, they discovered that they were in the middle of a small delicate flower garden. Red cheery blossoms, green bamboo, green pines, and green jade cypress were planted artfully in the garden. Two yuan-yang mandarin ducks were swimming leisurely through the small pond. There were also four white cranes standing besides the pool. Seeing such an unexpected lovely tableau, they all secretly admired the scenery. They went around a fake mountain and came into a large flower garden full of red and pink roses. The roses smelled wonderfully fragrant and were delicately beautiful.

Yingying turned her head slightly to look at Linghu Chong. He had a smile in his face and looked very happy. She whispered, "Do you think this is a lovely place?"

Linghu Chong smiled. "After we kick Dongfang Bubai out, let's stay here for a few months. You can teach me how to play the Qin and we would be very happy."

Yingying asked, "Are you deceiving me?"

"I'm only afraid that if I don't learn it well then Granny would blame me for that."

Yingying sneered and broke into a smile. The two of them were enjoying the beautiful scenery, and lagged behind the group. They saw Xiang Wentian and Shangguan Yun enter a small elegant house ahead. Linghu Chong and Yingying quickly followed them and entered the house. As soon as

they had entered, they could smell the strong fragrance of flowers. There was a painting of three beautiful ladies on the wall while the chairs inside had flowery embroidered cushions. Linghu Chong thought, "This is a lady's room. How could Dongfang Bubai be living in here? That's right. This must be his concubine's house. He's living in a gentle and soft village, that's why he doesn't care about the sect's matters."

A voice came from the inner room, "Brother Lian, who did you bring in with you?" The pitch of that voice was sharp and high, but at the same time still sounded coarse and rough. Whether it was from a man or a woman, that chilling voice would cause the hair on anyone's skin to stand straight up. Yang Lianting said, "It's one of your old friends. He said he just couldn't NOT see you."

The voice from the inner room spoke, "Why did you bring him in for? Only you alone are allowed to come in here. Aside from you, there is no one else that I want to see." The last two sentences were spoken quite flirtatiously, clearly sounding like the words that would come from a woman, yet the voice undoubtedly came from a man.

Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, Yingying, Tong Baixiong, and Shangguan Yun were all well acquainted with Dongfang Bubai, this voice they heard was definitely his, but sounded more like someone who was purposely squeezing his throat to raise the pitch as if learning to sing, pretending to be charming and seductive. The whole scene just appeared as if it were a joke. The look on everyone's face was of shock and bewilderment.

"I can't! If I didn't bring him in, he would've taken my life," Yang Lianting replied. "How could I not see you once more before I die?"

The person in the room said in a sharp voice, "Who would dare to insult you like that? Is it Ren Woxing? Tell him to come out!" Ren Woxing, hearing that Dongfang Bubai was able to deduce that it was him based on a single sentence,

dared not underestimate his intelligence. He signalled for the rest of them to slowly enter the room. Shangguan Yun lifted one of the silk embroidered curtains, carrying in Yang Lianting with him, while the rest of the group followed in from behind.

The inner room was layered with floral tapestries and brocade embroideries. A strong scent of perfume and powder filled the room. In the eastern corner on top of a make-up table a person was seated, clothed in exquisite pink robes. In his left hand was an embroidering apparatus and in his right hand was an embroidery needle. The person lifted his head and had an astonished look on his face. But the look of confusion on this person's face could never match the look on the faces of Ren Woxing and the others.

With the exception of Linghu Chong, everyone recognized this person as the person who had usurped the position of Chief of the Sun Moon Sect, who for the past ten or more years held the distinction of being the unrivalled number one fighter in all the world, Dongfang Bubai. But now, he had shaved off all his facial hair, entirely covered his face in beauty powder, and was dressed in clothing that neither resembled a man or a woman. His eyes were eerie looking, and appeared way too glamorously exaggerated, and were just a pain to look at. What was this heaven-shaking earth-shattering figure of the martial arts world doing in a woman's quarters sewing!

Ren Woxing who was originally filled with anger and rage, now couldn't help holding in his laughter. "Dongfang Bubai, have you fallen insane?"

Dongfang Bubai in his sharp voice answered, "So it really is Chief Ren! You've finally come! Brother Lian, you ... you ... how are you? Is he the one who hurt you?" He walked over to Yang Lianting 's side and carried him over to a bed. Dongfang Bubai had an extremely caring and worried look on his face, and asked, "Does it hurt very badly? They're only broken shin bones, not very serious. You need not worry, I'll immediately

help you start reconnecting the bones." He slowly undressed Yang's shoes and socks, pulled him across the fragrant bed covers, and into his arms, exactly like a loving wife would do for her husband.

Everyone present couldn't help but feel shocked and slightly disgusted at what they saw. They all wanted to laugh, but the show of affection they witnessed were just too strange, any laughter wouldn't even come out. Behind those elaborately decorative curtains, in that magnificent embroidery room, the air was filled with a quaint and unnatural aura.

Dongfang Bubai pulled out a green silk handkerchief from his side and gently wiped off the sweat and dirt from Yang Lianting's forehead. Yang Lianting became slightly enraged and berated, "A grave enemy is right in front of us, why are you still wasting time with these useless pleasantries? Beat them away first and we'll still have time for intimacy later."

Dongfang Bubai giggled. "Yes! Yes! Please don't get upset. Your legs must be in great pain. Oh it pains my heart to see you suffer."

Ren Woxing, Linghu Chong and the others had never witnessed such a strange sight in their lives, they had never even heard of such a thing. Homosexuality or paedophilia was not out of the ordinary. But to see Dongfang Bubai, the exalted Chief of the Sun Moon Sect, actually dressed up like a woman, and living in a woman's quarters? He must have gone insane. When Yang Lianting spoke to him, his tone of voice was harsh and threatening. Even so, Dongfang Bubai responded quite gently and refined like an elegant lady. They all found this perplexing and figured something had to be amiss.

Tong Baixiong couldn't help it anymore and took a step forward. "Brother Dongfang, you ... you ... what the hell are you doing?"

Dongfang Bubai lifted his head as his expression sunk. "Were you one of the people who injured my Brother Lian as well?"

"Why are you letting that nobody boss you around? He ordered some idiot to impersonate you and pretend to be you, issuing orders in your name, and foolishly messing around with everything. Did you even know about this?"

"Of course I knew. Brother Lian always has my best interests in his heart, he knew that administrating the entire sect was too tiring for me, so he took over in my stead. There's nothing wrong with that."

Tong Baixiong pointed to Yang Lianting. "This person wanted me dead. Did you know about that?"

Dongfang Bubai leisurely shook his head. "I didn't know about this. But if Brother Lian wanted you dead, then you must've done something wrong. Why didn't you let him kill you?"

Tong Baixiong looked startled. After he regained his composure, he started to laugh. In his laughter there was a certain hint of sadness. "So if he wanted to kill me, you'd just let him do so?"

"Whatever Brother Lian wishes, I will oblige," Dongfang Bubai replied. "He is the only one in this world who is truly good to me, and he is the only one in this world who I will be good to. Brother Tong, you and I have had quite a friendship, but you shouldn't have offended my Brother Lian."

Tong Baixiong's entire face flushed red. "And I had thought that you had completely lost your mind. You still know exactly what you're talking about. You still remember that we were the best of friends, friends who braved life and death together."

"Of course," Dongfang Bubai said. "If you offended me, I could care less. But you offended my Brother Lian, and that is unforgivable."

"Well, I've already offended him, so what are you going to do? That bastard wants to take my life but I don't think he

has the ability."

Dongfang Bubai extended his hand and gently combed his fingers through Yang Lianting's hair and asked gently, "Brother Lian, do you want to kill him?"

"Hurry up already! Stop dawdling around, you're starting to get on my nerves."

Dongfang Bubai softly said, "Yes!" He turned to face Tong Baixiong and said, "Brother Tong, today we are friends no longer. Please do not blame me for it."

Before Tong Baixiong had entered this place, he had grabbed a blade from one of the dead servants outside. As soon as he stepped in, his blade was at ready. He knew that Dongfang Bubai's martial prowess was exceptional. Although Dongfang Bubai appeared quite mad and out of his mind, Tong Baixiong still dared not let his guard down. He brandished his blade and took a defensive position.

Dongfang Bubai smiled coldly and said, "Oh, must this be so difficult? Brother Tong, during that time on Mount Taiheng, the Seven Tigers of Ludong had me surrounded. I hadn't yet finished my training then and was caught in an ambush by them. My right arm was severely injured, and I was certain that I was finished. If it weren't for you who came to my rescue, how could I have lived up to this day?"

Tong Baixiong asked, "You really still remember those times from the distant past?"

"How could I forget? And during the time when I took control of the Sun Moon Sect, Elder Luo of Sparrow Hall wouldn't submit to my rule, constantly nagging and complaining. It was you who dispatched Elder Luo with a single blow. It was from that day forth that not another person dared to speak up and question my authority. You definitely deserve much credit for that."

Tong Baixiong replied resentfully, "I was quite foolish back then!"

Dongfang Bubai shook his head and said, "You weren't foolish. You were just being a loyal friend. I met you when I

was only 11 years old. At that time, my family was poor and impoverished. Luckily you came and gave us aid for many years. When my parents passed away and we had no way to provide a proper burial for them, it was you who stepped in and took care of it for us."

Tong Baixiong waved away with his left hand and said: "Why bring up the past for?"

"I just had to," Dongfang Bubai said. "Brother Tong, it's not that I don't value our friendship and have forgotten all that you have done for me. It's just that you have offended my Brother Lian. He wants me to take your life, I just can't do otherwise."

Tong Baixiong shouted, "Enough! Enough!"

Suddenly, a pink blur streaked across their eyes, it appeared to be Dongfang Bubai. They heard a clang as the blade in Tong Baixiong's hand fell to the floor as he swayed back and forth in a daze on his feet. Then they saw Tong Baixiong's mouth open widely as his body fell forward straight onto the floor where it remained motionless. Although everything happened in only an instant, Ren Woxing and the others saw it clearly. The left and right Taiyang points above Tong Baixiong's eyebrows and the four Renzhong points below his nose all had a small red dot on them, as tiny drops of blood leaked out. It appeared that those points had been punctured by the sewing needle in Dongfang Bubai's hands. Ren Woxing and the others were shocked and took several steps backwards instinctively. Linghu Chong pulled Yingying behind him and shielded her with his own body. The room was filled with an eerie silence, no one even dared to take a single breath.

Ren Woxing slowly unsheathed his sword and said, "Dongfang Bubai, congratulations on completing your training of the 'Sunflower Manual'!"

"Chief Ren, it was you who gave me this 'Sunflower Manual'. I've never forgotten your kindness," Dongfang Bubai said.



"Really? Is that why you imprisoned me under the West Lake, never letting me see the light of day?"

"But I didn't kill you, did I?" Dongfang Bubai said. "If I had only instructed the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan not to give you water for about half a month, do you think you could've survived until now?"

Ren Woxing sarcastically said, "Well in that case, you treated me very well then?"

"Why of course! I arranged for you to enjoy paradise in the West Lake of Hangzhou. West Lake is world-renowned for having some of the best scenery under heaven. And Plum Manor on Mount Gu is considered one of the best spots in all of West Lake."

"So in fact you were letting me retire in the lap of luxury in that dungeon under the West Lake. I should be thanking you instead then."

Dongfang Bubai sighed and said, "Chief Ren, I'll never forget all that you've done for me. I was just a minor assistant under the Elder of the Wind and Thunder Hall. You were the one who went against convention and promoted me every year. You even presented me with our sect's most prized possession, the 'Sunflower Manual', and decreed that I would succeed you in the future as Chief of the Sun Moon Sect. I will always be grateful for the charity you have shown me."

Linghu Chong looked down at Tong Baixiong's corpse and thought, "Before you were constantly praising all the good things that Elder Tong had done for you, then you suddenly struck out and killed him. And now you're bringing up all the things that Chief Ren has done for you. But I doubt he'll fall for that same trick."

But Dongfang Bubai's movements were just fast beyond belief, like a flash of lightning, a clap of thunder, there was no way to tell when he was going to strike, such speed was definitely frightening.

Linghu Chong lifted his sword and pointed it straight towards Dongfang Bubai's chest. As soon as any of his four

limbs moved, he could easily stab forward. Only by taking the initiative could he hope to defeat this opponent. If he let Dongfang Bubai strike first, he would definitely end up dead. Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, Shangguan Yun, and Yingying were all focused intently on Dongfang Bubai, not even daring to blink an eye, because they knew that his attack could come at any time.

Dongfang Bubai continued, "At that time, I wanted only to become the Chief of the Sun Moon Sect, to reign for a thousand autumns, and ten thousand epochs, to unite the entire world. So I plotted arduously and fervently to usurp your position, but first I had to cut off your wings. Brother Xiang, it appeared that this plan of mine couldn't escape your attentive eyes. In the Sun Moon Sect, besides Chief Ren and I, I'd have to say that you are also quite a talent."

Xiang Wentian's hands were clenched tightly as he focused hard, he didn't dare to break his concentration with a reply. Dongfang Bubai let out a sigh and continued, "When I first ascended to the position of Chief of the Sun Moon Sect, it was definitely glorious. I was showered with chants and praises of 'Talented in the academics, gifted in the martial arts. For the prosperity of our divine sect.' What undignified rubbish they were all spewing. It was only after I started to practice the 'Sunflower Manual' did I realize what was truly important in this life. After that I started to diligently train my internal energy. Several years later, I finally understood the beauty of life, the myriad of all things."

As all of them listened to his high shrill voice speaking, their hands began to sweat. His words were definitely logical and coherent, extremely clear and to the point. But his strange androgynous, neither male nor female appearance made them all shiver and cringe the more they looked at him. Dongfang Bubai's eyes slowly shifted towards Yingying. Dongfang Bubai asked, "Young lady Ren, how have I been to you these past few years?"

"You've been very good to me," Yingying answered.

Dongfang Bubai let out a sigh and said softly, "I never say it but I've always envied you greatly. Being born a woman is definitely a hundred times better than being born as a rotten man. In addition, you're attractive and beautiful beyond compare, young and lively. If only I had the chance to switch places with you, forget about the Leadership of the Sun Moon Sect, I wouldn't even want the Emperor's throne."

Linghu Chong laughed and said, "If you were to switch places with Miss Ren, then that means that I'd have to marry an old twisted monster, I don't think that would be very easy to do!"

When Ren Woxing and the others heard those words escaped his mouth, they were quite shocked. Dongfang Bubai's eyes glared at Linghu Chong, his eyebrows flared up as his face turned green. "Who are you? How dare you talk to me like that. You've certainly got some guts." His tone of voice has sharp, he was definitely annoyed beyond repair.

Although Linghu Chong was aware of the precarious situation that he was in, he couldn't help but laughed and uttered, "Well, does it really matter whether I'm a handsome young lad, or a beautiful young maiden? What I resent the most are those shameless old men who dress up like women."

Dongfang Bubai screeched back angrily, "I'm asking you, just who exactly are you?"

"My name is Linghu Chong!"

Dongfang Bubai's anger gradually subsided and a smile broke on his face as he said, "Ah! So you are Linghu Chong. I've wanted to meet you for some time, I've heard that Miss Ren is totally enamoured by you, to the point where she would even be willing to cut off her own head for you. I had the impression that you must be a handsome, charming, and talented young gentleman. But the more I look at you, you seem quite ordinary and plain. Compared with my Brother Lian, I'd have to say that you're off by a lot."

Linghu Chong laughed and replied, "There really is nothing much good about me, only that I am true to my own

feelings. Although that Yang buddy of yours is quite handsome, it's a pity and quite disturbing that he likes withered old weeds, coming here to ..."

Dongfang Bubai stammered, "You ... you idiot ... what are you babbling about?" His entire face blushed red. Suddenly, a pink blur of a figure flashed across the room, a needle flew directly towards Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong had intended on angering him by saying those words, but as he saw Dongfang Bubai's sleeves swayed, he raised his sword and stabbed towards Dongfang Bubai's throat. That one sword stab was incredibly fast, if Dongfang Bubai didn't withdraw, that blade would have pierced through his throat. But at that same moment, Linghu Chong suddenly felt a slight pain on his left cheek, he swung towards his left in defence.

Dongfang Bubai's speed was simply unimaginable. In that flash of an instant, he managed to prick Linghu Chong's face, and then contracted his arm to block Linghu Chong's sword strike with his needle right afterwards. Luckily that strike from Linghu Chong was incredibly swift as well, it forced his opponent to draw up a defence, coupled with the fact that Dongfang Bubai was quite riled up and angry, the needle just slightly missed its mark -- the Renzhong acupoint on Linghu Chong's face. The needle in Dongfang Bubai's hand was no longer than an inch, light enough to be blown away by the wind, light enough to float on water, yet he was able to parry Linghu Chong's sword head-on with it. Dongfang Bubai's martial arts level was definitely beyond comprehension. Linghu Chong was startled immensely, he knew that today he had run into a foe of unimaginable power. He knew that if he gave his opponent the leisure of the initiative, his life would be in grave danger. So instead, he unleashed four quick stabs at Dongfang Bubai, all aimed at vital spots.

Dongfang Bubai cried out in surprise and remarked, "Excellent swordsmanship!" He parried to the left, to the right, above and below, and knocked away all four of Linghu

Chong's attacks. Linghu Chong stared intently at Dongfang Bubai's movements. That tiny sewing needle blocked four of his strikes yet showed not a single sign of wear or flaw. He didn't dare let Dongfang Bubai counterattack so with a shout, he hacked straight at Dongfang Bubai's head. Dongfang Bubai held the needle in his right hand between his thumb and index fingers, and simply lifted it upwards, stopping Linghu Chong's sword dead in its path, impeding it from striking downwards entirely.

Linghu Chong's arm felt numb, but he saw a pink blur flashed by and a figure dashed towards him from his left. It was already too late to block and too late to avoid it, in the spur of the moment, his sword rose and flashed towards Dongfang Bubai's left eye as well, it was a move that would result in injuries for both sides. Stabbing towards an opponent's eyes was a very underhanded move, a move that experts never used. But the 'Dugu Nine Swords' that Linghu Chong had mastered was formless to begin with, he was also quite a carefree person, and never really thought of himself as a master, also in the midst of such danger he had no time to care about rules and etiquette. But he suddenly felt another small sharp pain near his left brow, as Dongfang Bubai leapt away and avoided his sword stab. Linghu Chong realized that he had been pricked again by that needle in Dongfang Bubai's hands. But because Dongfang Bubai had to avoid Linghu Chong's sword, his accuracy was a little off again and missed his target, else Linghu Chong's one eye would have been instantly blinded. In a fright, Linghu Chong's sword lashed out like a violent storm, wildly stabbing and slashing in every which way, making it extremely difficult for the opponent to have time to counter with a single move. Dongfang Bubai parried to the left and blocked to the right, yet still had time to leisurely praise, "Excellent swordsmanship, excellent swordsmanship!"

Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian both saw that the situation was starting to get out of control, one brandished

his sword, the other his whip, and both attacked Dongfang Bubai at the same time. The combined force of these three masters of the martial-realm was certainly devastatingly powerful. But Dongfang Bubai, with a handful of needles in each hand, unleashed a flurry of pricks and pokes at the three of them. His movements were as quick as lightning and he showed no signs whatsoever of weakness. Shangguan Yun took up his blade as well and joined in the flurry of attacks, making the battle a four-against-one. After a brief moment in the confusion of battle, Shangguan Yun cried out as his blade hit the floor with a clang, with a flip he landed on the ground, writhing in pain over his left eye which had just been blinded by Dongfang Bubai. Linghu Chong noticed that Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian were attacking Dongfang Bubai all out, and that Dongfang Bubai showed no intentions of attacking him, so his sword sprung into action, unleashing stab after stab at Dongfang Bubai. But Dongfang Bubai's body was like a ghost, whirling in and out of sight, drifting about like formless smoke. The tip of Linghu Chong's sword was always several inches off its mark.

Suddenly, Xiang Wentian cried out with an 'AH', followed by Linghu Chong who gasped with an 'HEY', as the two of them had been struck by needles. Although the power of Ren Woxing's 'Art of Essence Absorbing' was powerful and deep, Dongfang Bubai's movements were fast to the extreme, he was nearly impossible to catch. Secondly, his weapon was an embroidery needle, he had no way of absorbing his internal energy through it. After several more exchanges, Ren Woxing cried out with an 'AH' as well, his chest and throat both having been pricked. Fortunately, Linghu Chong was unleashing an extremely fast attack at that time, forcing Dongfang Bubai to fend for his own safety, one of the needles missed its mark, while the other one did not penetrate very deep at all, both attacks were unable to injure the opponent.

The four of them had Dongfang Bubai surrounded and were attacking him all at once, and yet they hadn't even touched him yet, while all of them had already been pierced by his needles. Yingying, who was watching on the side, became increasingly worried, she thought, "I wonder if those needles are coated in poison, if they are then we'd be in deep trouble!"

Dongfang Bubai's movements became faster and faster, his body spun around in a pink blur all over the room. Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Linghu Chong were all panting and shouting in frustration and anger. All three of their weapons were infused with their internal energy, winds of force rocked through the room. Yet not even a peep escaped from Dongfang Bubai.

Yingying thought to herself, "If I throw myself into the battle, I'd only hinder their efforts and get in the way, what good would that bring? It appears that Dongfang Bubai still has the upper hand even though it's a three-on-one." From the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of Yang Lianting sitting on top of the bed, focused intently on the battle, his face full of concern. An idea crossed Yingying's mind, as she crept towards the bed. Suddenly the dagger in her left hand rose, and stabbed into Yang Lianting's right shoulder. Yang Lianting was caught by surprise and could only cry out in pain. Yingying then drew her sword and stabbed it into his thigh.

Yang Lianting realized what she was trying to do, she wanted him to cry out in pain to disrupt Dongfang Bubai's concentration. So he tried his hardest to endure the pain and held it in, not another sound escaped his mouth. Yingying became enraged and shouted, "Are you going to cry out or not? I'll cut off your fingers one by one!" Her sword rose and sliced off one of the fingers on his right hand. Yang Lianting was indeed resilient, although the pain was unbearable, he managed to keep his mouth shut. But the first cry that Yang Lianting gave out before had already reached Dongfang

Bubai's ears. From the corner of his eyes, he saw Yingying beside the bed, slowly torturing Yang Lianting with her sword. With the shout "Little witch!", a pink cloud of a figure darted towards the bed at Yingying. She withdrew at the very last second to avoid the incoming attack, but it wasn't clear if Dongfang Bubai's needles had struck their mark. Linghu Chong and Ren Woxing saw the opportunity as both slashed their swords across Dongfang Bubai's back and Xiang Wentian snapped his whip violently towards Yang Lianting's head. Dongfang Bubai disregarded his own safety, and stabbed his needle backwards into Xiang Wentian's chest.

Xiang Wentian felt his entire body go numb, as his whip fell to the floor. Right at that time, Linghu Chong and Ren Woxing both plunged their swords through the back of Dongfang Bubai. Dongfang Bubai's entire body shook, and then collapsed on top of Yang Lianting. Ren Woxing was overjoyed as he pulled his sword out from Dongfang Bubai's back and pointed the tip at the back of his neck and said, "Dongfang Bubai, finally ... finally you've fallen by my hand!" In the rush of heated combat, he hadn't yet caught his breath. Yingying was too shaken up by the fight, her two legs became weak, as she wavered back and forth and then fainted to the floor. Linghu Chong rushed to her side and caught her just as she fell, he saw a tiny gash of blood on her left cheek.

Yingying said, "You've sustained quite a number of injuries too." She extended her sleeve and wiped across Linghu Chong's face, her sleeve became stained with dots and streaks of red blood.

Linghu Chong turned to Xiang Wentian and asked, "Are your injuries serious?"

Xiang Wentian forced a laugh and said, "I won't die that easily!"

Blood gushed forth from the two fatal wounds on Dongfang Bubai's back. He cried painfully, "Brother Lian,



Brother Lian, how cruel of these villains to torture you like this!"

Yang Lianting replied angrily, "You've always claimed that your martial arts was invincible, how come you can't even take care of these bastards?"

Dongfang Bubai replied, "I ... I already ..."

"You what?"

"I've already tried my best, their ... their martial arts are quite strong as well." His body suddenly trembled as he rolled to the floor. Ren Woxing was afraid that he would get up again so he stabbed his sword into Dongfang Bubai's left thigh.

Dongfang Bubai laughed feebly and said, "Chief Ren, you've finally won, I've lost."

Ren Woxing let out a hearty laugh and said, "You little sneak, do you think you can change what has transpired?"

Dongfang Bubai shook his head and said, "I'm not trying to change anything. Since I've been defeated here today, I know that my life is over." His voice had been extremely high and sharp, but now it had sunk to a lower tone as he continued, "But if we had fought one-on-one, there is no way that you would have defeated me."

Ren Woxing hesitated for a second, and then replied, "You're right, your martial arts is definitely at a higher level than mine, that I truly admire."

Dongfang Bubai went on, "Linghu Chong, your swordsmanship is incredible, but if we fought one-on-one, you wouldn't be my match either."

Linghu Chong acknowledged, "That is true, in fact the four of us combined wouldn't be able to overcome you. It was only because of your attachment to that person surnamed Yang, that we were able to break your concentration and injure you. Your martial arts are at an unimaginable level, there is no one worthy of the title, 'Number One Fighter under the Heavens' other than you. In that sense, I truly have the utmost respect for you."

Dongfang Bubai slightly snickered and said, "That the two of you are able to admit that, at least I know that you two are true men, with sincerity and integrity. Aye, what a pity, what a pity, ever since I mastered the 'Sunflower Manual', I followed exactly what was written on that script. First, I had to castrate myself to train my qi, then I had to refine pellets and intake herbs. Gradually, I lost all my facial hair, and my voice started to change, my temper started to change as well. After that, I was no longer attracted to women, I killed all seven concubines that I had with me, and ... and I put all my affection and care towards Yang Lianting. If only I were born a woman, then that would've been perfect."

"Chief Ren, I ... I'm going to die soon, I beg only one thing of you, ... please ... if you could take into consideration how well I've treated your daughter all these years ..."

Ren Woxing asked, "What is it?"

Dongfang Bubai requested, "Please spare Yang Lianting 's life, please just let him off the Dark Wood Cliff."

Ren Woxing answered, "I plan to cut him into a thousand pieces, and torture him to death over the course of a hundred days, cutting off a finger today, slicing off a toe tomorrow."

Dongfang Bubai cried out, "You ... how can you be so cruel!" Dongfang Bubai lunged up fiercely and suddenly at Ren Woxing. Because of his severe injuries, his speed was nowhere near as fast as it was before, but his attack was still astonishingly quick. Ren Woxing stabbed outwards with his sword, it penetrated the front of his chest and exited through his back. Just at that time, Dongfang Bubai flicked his finger, the needle in his hand shot out and pierced Ren Woxing's right eye. Ren Woxing withdrew his sword and leapt back, he took a deep breath and leaned his back against a wall. The impact caused nearly half the wall to collapse under his immense force. Yingying looked at her father's right eye and saw a needle embedded into one of his pupils. Fortunately, Dongfang Bubai had not much strength left in his hands, or else that needle could've punctured straight into Ren

Woxing's brain. Although his life was not in danger, his right eye was permanently blinded.

Yingying tried to get the needle out but it was too short and only a fraction of it was actually still sticking out of his eye, so there was no place for her fingers to hold on to. She turned around to pick up the embroidery frame that Dongfang Bubai threw away and pulled out a piece of thread from it. She then threaded it through the needle's hole and pulled the needle out. Ren Woxing screamed in pain. The needle was hanging by the thread as blood dripped from it. Ren Woxing was furious and gave Dongfang Bubai's corpse a fierce kick. The corpse flew up and hit Yang Lianting's head. Ren Woxing used all of his power in that one kick and as they clashed heads, both Dongfang Bubai and Yang Lianting's heads burst open spilling their brain matters everywhere. Ren Woxing had been holding this big animosity for a long time, his leadership of the Sun Moon Sect was usurped and he had now been blinded in one eye, so he was feeling happy and angry at the same time. He laughed loudly towards the sky shaking all the tiles in the house. But this laughter was full of anger.

Shangguan Yun said, "Congratulations Chief for executing this big traitor. From now on, our sect would be sheltered under Chief's protection and its power would spread throughout the four oceans. Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu."

Ren Woxing laughingly scolded him, "Nonsense! What long live?" Suddenly he felt that if he could really live long and unify the Jianghu, then that would be the happiest thing in the world. He could not help laughing loudly at this. He laughed because he really felt happy and was feeling proud of himself. Xiang Wentian used Dongfang Bubai's needle to pierce the acupoint on his left chest. In a moment, his whole body felt better and his four limbs were able to move freely. He also said, "Congratulations Chief, congratulations Chief!"

Ren Woxing laughingly said, "You've done a really big service by punishing this traitor." He then turned his head around and said to Linghu Chong, "Chong'er's contribution is also not small."

Linghu Chong saw the trace of blood on Yingying's white jade cheek and fear still lingered in his heart as he remembered how fierce the fight was. He said, "If it weren't for Yingying attacking Yang Lianting, it wouldn't have been easy to kill Dongfang Bubai." He stopped for a moment, and continued, "Luckily his needle wasn't coated with poison."

Yingying trembled when she heard this and softly said, "Please don't say anymore. That person wasn't a man, he was a monster. Ai, when I was small, he used to carry me up the mountain to pick up vegetables and fruits. How greatly he has changed today!"

Ren Woxing put his hand inside Dongfang Bubai's pocket and felt an old thin page in there. He took it out and saw many tiny letters written on it. He waved that paper around and said, "This paper is the 'Sunflower Manual'. It's written clearly in the beginning, 'To learn this Divine Art, castrate yourself first.' I'd never be so foolish to do such a thing, Haha, haha, ..." He then moaned deeply and said, "But this Manual actually conveys a lot of profound martial arts in it, and anyone who manages to see it would definitely be tempted into learning it. Fortunately I've learned the Art of Essence Absorbing at that time. Otherwise, I'd probably have learnt the martial arts written in this Manual."<sup>1</sup>

He again gave Dongfang Bubai's corpse another kick. He laughed and said, "You were definitely crafty and sly, but you still couldn't have guessed my real intention in giving you the 'Sunflower Manual'. You have such a wild ambition and bossy attitude, do you think I wouldn't notice it? Haha, haha!"

Linghu Chong's heart turned cold and he thought, "So Chief Ren actually had a bad intention in giving him the 'Sunflower Manual'. The two of them were being crafty and

were plotting against each other.” He saw blood was still flowing out of Ren Woxing’s right eye and his mouth was opened in a mad smile, he looked completely mean and ferocious. Linghu Chong felt terrified seeing him.

Ren Woxing extended his hand and found out that Dongfang Bubai had indeed cut off his testicles. He laughed madly and said, “This ‘Sunflower Manual’ would be good for eunuchs to practise.” He then rolled that old paper in both of his hands and ripped it into a thousand pieces. He then hurled both of his hands open and the pieces of paper were blown all over the place by the wind. Yingying let out a sigh and said, “It’s best to destroy such a harmful thing!”

Linghu Chong laughingly said, “You’re afraid that I’m going to learn it?”

Yingying’s whole face blushed a deep red and she pursed her lips. She then said, “You’re speaking improperly.” Yingying then took out a medicine and applied it to her father’s and Shangguan Yun’s eye injuries.

Everyone’s face was also full of uncountable needle holes. Yingying looked into the mirror and saw a trace of blood on her left cheek. Even though it was really thin, it would still leave a scar when it heals and she didn’t feel happy about it.

Linghu Chong said, “You already have all the luck in this world so the ghosts and gods would envy you. So this little scar on your face would definitely bring untold amount of good fortune.”

“What lucky thing do I have?”

“You’re beautiful and smart, your martial art is high, your father is the divine sect’s Chief, and you yourself is admired by many heroes in this world. Furthermore, you’re a woman that even Dongfang Bubai was jealous of.” Yingying gave him a smile and forgot all about the injury to her face.

Ren Woxing and the four of them went out of Dongfang Bubai’s little house, went through the garden, tunnel, and went back to the hall. Ren Woxing passed down a command

ordering all the Halls' elders and the Fragrant Masters to come see him. He sat at the Chief's seat and laughingly said, "That servant Dongfang Bubai had many wicked schemes. He sat highly on the cliff and put a big distance between his subordinates and himself so all of them were awed by him. What's this hall called?"

Shangguan Yun replied, "Reporting to Chief. This hall is called 'Hall of Refined Kindness'. This name came from the praise to Chief which says 'Refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior'."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior! Skilled with both pen and sword; that's not easy to do!" He then beckoned to Linghu Chong. "Chong'er, come here." Linghu Chong went in front of him.

"Chong'er, that day in Hangzhou, I invited you to join our sect. At that time, I had just escaped from my imprisonment and was all by myself, so you probably didn't believe all my promises to you. This time, I've already regained the leadership of the sect. The first matter I'd like to bring up is that old matter again..." Ren Woxing said till here when his right hand patted the chair next to him. "Sooner or later, this position will be yours. Haha, haha!"

Linghu Chong said, "Chief, Yingying's kindness towards me is high like the mountain. If you wanted me to do anything, I would never decline it. But I've already given my promise to other people to do another matter. So this matter of joining the divine sect, please forgive junior for not being able to promise you this."

Both of Ren Woxing's eyebrows were gradually raised, and he gloomily said, "You know what's going to happen for not listening to my order!"

Yingying went up and pulled Linghu Chong's arm. "Daddy, today is your big day. Why must you be worried about this kind of small matter? We can slowly talk about him joining the sect later."

Ren Woxing turned his head slightly to the right and glanced sideways with his left eye towards the two of them. "Hng, Yingying, you only want your husband and don't want your father anymore, don't you?"

Xiang Wentian laughed at the side. "Chief, Brother Linghu is only a young hero so he's still very stubborn. Let subordinate speak about it slowly with him..." As he said till here, there were tens of people outside the hall calling out, "Martial Hall elders, Hall Masters and Vice Hall Masters, five branches of Fragrant Masters and Vice Fragrant Masters have come to see the refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, the just and wise Chief. Chief flourishes the sacred sect and benefits the common people. Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu."

Ren Woxing shouted, "Enter!"

More than ten men entered the hall and knelt in front of Ren Woxing. When he was the chief of the Divine Sun Moon Sect, he only cupped his fists in saluting the brothers in the sect. So when he saw them kneeling down, he immediately stood up and waved his arm. "There's no need..." Suddenly he thought, "It's not sufficient to receive these people without power. In the past, my leadership of the sect was usurped by traitors because I treated them too leniently. Since Dongfang Bubai already introduced this kneeling as propriety then I don't need to change it." He immediately cupped his fist back at them and didn't say anything as he sat back down.

Not long after that, another group of people entered the hall. When they knelt before him, Ren Woxing did not stand up anymore and just nodded his head. At this time, Linghu Chong had already retreated to the entrance of the hall and was far away from the Chief's seat. Under the dim light of the hall, Ren Woxing's face looked blur from where he was. He thought, "There's no difference whether Ren Woxing or Dongfang Bubai is sitting in that seat." He then heard the praises of all the hall leaders and Fragrant Masters getting

louder and louder as they went, and they all sounded like they were afraid of Ren Woxing. For the past ten years, they had been working their best for Dongfang Bubai so it was unavoidable that they were feeling guilty towards Chief Ren. They didn't know how Chief Ren would punish them if he brought up the past events. Furthermore, some of them had never known of Ren Woxing before. Some of these people only knew how to work hard for Dongfang Bubai and Yang Lianting to avoid being punished. So when there was this sudden change of leadership in the sect, all they could do was to sing their praises to the new Chief.

Linghu Chong stood at the entrance of the hall with the sun shining down on his back. Outside the hall was clear and bright while there were close to a hundred people prostrating themselves on the floor inside the hall singing their disgusting praises. He couldn't say his loathing out loud so he thought, "Yingying treats me very well, so if she really wants me to join the Divine Sun Moon Sect, I can't reject her idea. But it has to wait till I go to Songshan and stop Zuo Lengchan from becoming the Headmaster of the Five Mountains School since this was my agreement with Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. Also, I have to find a female disciple from Heng-Shan and pass down to her the leadership of the school. After all these are done, then I'll be free to join the divine sect. But if you want me to be like these people, isn't that just too disgusting? Later when Yingying becomes my wife, then Chief Ren would be my father in law, and it would only be proper if I kowtow to him. But all these 'flourishes the sacred sect and benefits the common people', 'refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, the just and wise', they're just too shameful for a real man to utter. They really tarnish the pureness of a real man! I originally thought that this nonsense was done by Dongfang Bubai and Yang Lianting to punish someone. But looking at the situation now, Chief Ren is actually flattered to hear these words and he's not disgusted at all by these." He again



thought, "That day in the Cliff of Contemplation on Huashan, I saw the martial arts of the ten elders from Devil Sect and they actually had many heroes among their seniors. If not so, how could Sun Moon Sect fight against the orthodox parties for the last hundred years and still be their equal? From the warriors they have like Brother Xiang, Shangguan Yun, Jia Bu, Tong Baixiong, the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, which one isn't an outstanding gentleman? These groups of heroes are all forced to kneel to other people every day and read aloud those dictions while they're actually cursing in their hearts. Saying disgusting things and receiving such rudeness. Actually, accepting to say those shameless things is even more disgusting. All these wronged heroes, how could they still be called heroes?"

He then heard Ren Woxing, being pleased with himself, said loudly, "You were all under Dongfang Bubai before and has done many things for him. I've secretly found out what every single one of you has done. But I'm a very open-minded person, so I won't blame anyone. From today, everyone must be loyal to me then I would treat you well and share all the glory and honour." In a blink of an eye, the hall was drowned in praises. Everyone was saying chief was just and wise, his heart was open like the ocean, and that a big man doesn't do what a small man does. They also said they would obey chief's order completely, be loyal to him, go through fire and water, would not balk at a thousand deaths, and be resolved to do chief's biddings.

Ren Woxing waited for them to say their praises until they gradually became quiet. Ren Woxing continued, "But if anyone dared to revolt and not listen to my order then I will punish him severely. Whoever commits this sin, then his entire family would be executed." All of them answered together, "Subordinate would never dare."

Linghu Chong quivered when he heard these words and was really afraid. He inwardly thought, "Chief Ren is just the same as Dongfang Bubai. He's using fear to control the sect.

Everyone is very deferential towards him even though they're actually angry and full of rejection in their hearts. How can they be said to be 'loyal' to him?"

Some people then started to reveal Dongfang Bubai's faults to Ren Woxing. They told him that Dongfang Bubai was offended by honesty, how he only listened to Yang Lianting, how he killed many innocent people, how he was selfish in giving gifts and punishments, how he loved to hear praises, and how he ruined the sect. There were also some people who said that he ruined the sect's customs by giving out the Dark Command Wood to anyone and that he forced people to take the divine three corpse brain pill. Another people said that he drank and ate extravagantly, that every time he ate, he slaughtered three cows, five pigs, and ten sheep.

Linghu Chong thought, "How can one person eat that much? How can he eat three cows, five pigs, and ten sheep? He must've eaten together with his friends and subordinates. How can slaughtering cows and sheep be considered a big sin when Dongfang Bubai was chief?"

But he then heard everyone kept on bringing up Dongfang Bubai's other faults more and more, and each fault was getting even more trivial. Some people scolded him for being very moody; some people scolded him for loving to wear flowery gown and not coming out to meet them. There were also people who said that he was very thin skinned and silly; Another person said that his martial art was lowly, always frightened during battles, and he in fact had no real abilities at all.

Linghu Chong pondered, "You're all scolding Dongfang Bubai for all sorts of things. Even though I don't know whether what you're saying is true or not, I know that when the five of us fought him, we barely escaped alive with our lives and almost lost our lives under his needle. If Dongfang Bubai's martial art were low, then there's no one in this world who has a high martial art. You're really just spouting nonsense." He again heard another person said that

Dongfang Bubai was very lewd and just forcefully grabbed any girls he wanted. He had also offended many married women in the sect and had also had many babies from these affairs.

Linghu Chong thought, "Dongfang Bubai had already learned this really strange 'Sunflower Manual' and castrated himself a long time ago. What nonsense of lewd affairs and making lots of babies are you talking about, haha, haha!" He thought till here when he actually laughed really loudly unable to restrain himself any further. This loud laughter was heard from afar. Everyone in the long hall turned their heads around to have a look and glared angrily at him. Yingying knew that he was causing trouble so she quickly rushed over and pulled on his arm. "Brother Chong, there's nothing to hear here, they're only talking about Dongfang Bubai's stuff. Let's go down the cliff and have a look around." Linghu Chong poked his tongue out and laughingly said, "We don't want to make your daddy angry." The two of them walked out of the hall shoulder to shoulder, passed through that white jade decorated archway, and went down using the bamboo baskets.

The two of them leaned close to each other inside the bamboo basket as they went down. They saw the light mist around them and felt as if they were floating. It was as if they had gone to another world compared to the situation inside the hall. Linghu Chong looked up to the top of the Dark Wood Cliff and saw the golden reflection of sunlight from the writing on the white jade archway. He felt pleased. "I've finally left that place. The things happening last night were like a nightmare. From now on, I'd never set foot on Dark Wood Cliff ever again."

"Brother Chong, what are you thinking?"

"Can you be together with me?"

Yingying's face blushed red and she said, "We... We..."

"What?"

Yingying lowered her head and said, "We're not married yet. How... how can I follow you?"

"Didn't you go around Jianghu with me before?"

"That was because I had to. Also, that's why a lot of rumours are flying around. Just then Daddy said I... said I want to be with you and don't want him anymore. If I go with you then Daddy would definitely be unhappy. Daddy was also imprisoned for more than ten years so his temper isn't good, so I want to accompany him. As long as your heart is faithful then in the future we can accompany each other." The last few words that she said were really soft that they couldn't be heard.

By coincidence, a white cloud floated by them wrapping around the bamboo basket and the two of them. Linghu Chong could only blurrily look at Yingying. Even though Yingying was leaning close besides him, he couldn't see her appearance clearly and it was as if she had been carried out by the cloud and he couldn't touch her. When the bamboo basket reached the bottom of the cliff, they stepped out of the basket. Yingying whispered, "You're going to go now?"

"Zuo Lengchan has invited the five mountains sword schools to come to a meeting on the fifteenth of the third month to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. He's very ambitious and would bring disaster to all the heroes in this realm. I must go to this gathering on Songshan."

Yingying nodded her head and said, "Brother Chong, Zuo Lengchan's sword art isn't your match but you must guard against his plotting."

Linghu Chong replied, "Yes."

"I should go with you but I'm only a witch from the Devil Sect. So if I were to go with you to Songshan then I'd just hinder you there." She stopped for a moment, before she dispiritedly said, "When you become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, your reputation would be well known in this world. Our two paths of orthodox and demonical are

irreconcilable so... it's... it's... it's going to be even more difficult for us."

Linghu Chong held her hand in his and softly said, "You still don't believe me?"

Yingying mournfully laughed. "I believe you." After some time, she quietly said, "When someone practises his martial art, it would get higher and higher, and his reputation would also get bigger and bigger. I felt that often, that person would also start to change. He himself might not know it but his treatment of matters would be totally different than before. Uncle Dongfang was like that, and I'm worried that Daddy might be like that."

Linghu Chong smiled. "Your father wouldn't go and learn the martial art in that 'Sunflower Manual'. That Manual had already been destroyed by him so even if he wanted to practise it now, he wouldn't be able to."

"I'm not talking about martial art, I'm talking about someone's temperament. Even if Uncle Dongfang didn't learn the 'Sunflower Manual', he would still kill and rob once he usurped the leadership of the Divine Sun Moon Sect. He would've naturally become conceited."

"Yingying, there's no harm in worrying about other people but there's no need to worry about me. I'm born with this carefree attitude and would never be like that. Even if I were to become conceited, I would always always always be like this in front of you."

Yingying let out a long sigh and said, "That's good then."

Suddenly Linghu Chong thought of something and said, "Everyone in the world already knows about the two of us. Those friends that you sent to the island in South Sea, can you let them come back now?"

Yingying smiled and replied, "I've already sent people to bring them back to the central plains."

Linghu Chong pulled her close to him and lightly hugged her. "It's goodbye for now. Once that matter in Songshan is

settled then I'll come here to look for you. Then we'll never be apart again."

Yingying's eyes flashed happily and she lightly said, "If only all your matters go smoothly then we can meet earlier. I'll... I'll wait here and look out for you every night and day."

"Alright!" Linghu Chong then gave her a kiss on her cheek. Yingying's face turned red with bashfulness and pushed him away.

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and led his horse away as he went away from the Sun Moon Sect.

# **Chapter 32: School Merger**

**Translated by: Pokit;**

**Edited by: Hhaung**





**The peak of Mount Songshan stood alone in the middle, thrusting towards the sky and looking down upon thousands of other peaks. With few clouds in the sky, sunshine shined through the pure and fresh air. Cheng-Gao and Yumen stood to the north; the Yellow River looked like a thin line; the city wall of Luo Yang could be vaguely seen to the west; range upon range of mountains were to the east and south.**

Within a day, Linghu Chong reached Mount Heng-Shan. When the disciples guarding at the bottom of the mountain saw him returning, they quickly sent a couple of disciples up the mountain to inform their martial sisters, who immediately came down the mountain to welcome him back. The disciples residing at Heng-Shan Other Courtyard followed shortly after down the mountain to meet him. Linghu Chong inquired about how everything fared at the Other Courtyard. Zu Qianqiu answered, "Reporting to Headmaster. All the male disciples live at the Other Courtyard and no one has dared to go up the peak. Everyone's been well-behaved."

Linghu Chong happily said, "That's very good."

Yihe laughingly said, "None of them came up the peak. But it's not true that they've been well-behaved."

Linghu Chong was startled and he quickly asked, "What?"

"All day and all night long, I always hear their clamour at Tong Yuan valley all the way up from the convent."

Linghu Chong laughed loudly when he heard this. "It's impossible to ask these friends to be quiet."

Linghu Chong then briefly told them that Ren Woxing had managed to snatch back the chief position of the sect. The group of heroes were really happy to hear this and their cheering was heard throughout the valley. Everyone thought, "Chief Ren has snatched back his seat then Sacred Lady has naturally gained a lot of power in the sect. From now on, the situation will definitely be much better for everyone."

When Linghu Chong reached the Xianxing Peak, he first went to the Wuse Convent to kowtow to the three Shi Tai's tablets. Then as there weren't many days left to the meeting at Mount Songshan on the fifteenth of the third month, he consulted with Yihe, Yiqing and the rest of the senior disciples on that matter. They decided that Heng-Shan School should go to Henan first before going to Mount Songshan. Yihe and the other disciples all said that in order to go against Songshan School, they shouldn't take the group of heroes at Tong Yuan valley with them to Mount Songshan. Even though taking them admittedly would make Heng-Shan School look grand, the other schools of Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan would criticise them for doing so, and it would even give Zuo Lengchan excuses that might disadvantage the Heng-Shan School.

Yihe said, "Martial Brother Headmaster's sword art is above Zuo Lengchan, so taking up the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School is guaranteed. But if the heroes from Tong Yuan valley were with us at that time, then they'll surely give out excuses."

Linghu Chong smiled. "Our aim is to prevent Zuo Lengchan from annexing the other four schools. I'm not even remotely presentable being the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, so there's no need to talk about me becoming the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. And since everyone already said not to take the Tong Yuan valley's brothers to Mount Songshan then we won't take them."

He then went to Tong Yuan valley to talk to Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, and Old Man. They also agreed that not taking the Tong Yuan valley heroes to Mount Songshan was a good plan. They wanted Linghu Chong to take the female disciples and go first while the three of them would explain to the group of heroes to make them understand.

That night, Linghu Chong drank with the group of heroes to their hearts' contents. The original plan was to make their way to Songshan on the next day. But when he woke up, it

was already past midday and he had not put everything in order so they had to delay their journey by a day. Early the next morning, Linghu Chong led the female disciples to go to Mount Songshan.

They had been on the road for a few days when they arrived at a city, and rested inside a large ruined temple. Zheng E and six disciples went out to patrol outside to protect the group from any Songshan School's plot. But not long after, Zheng E and Qin Juan flew back and shouted, "Martial Brother Headmaster, quickly come and take a look!"

The two of them were grinning widely and it seemed that they had seen something funny. Yihe hastily asked, "What's the matter?"

Qin Juan giggled. "Martial Sister, you come and have a look yourself."

Linghu Chong quickly followed the two of them into an inn and went to an outside guesthouse on the west side of the inn. They immediately saw a few people stacked into a big pile on a brick bed. They were the Peach Valley Six Fairies. All six of them had their acupoints sealed and were unable to move. Linghu Chong was greatly astonished. He quickly went into the house and pulled up Peachtree Root Fairy who was at the top of the pile. He saw that there was a piece of peach seed squeezed into his mouth so he helped him take it out. Peachtree Root Fairy was angry and he scolded, "Your granny, your eighteen generations won't die a good death, your eighteen grandsons will all have no bums, no eyes,..."

Linghu Chong laughed and he interrupted, "Wei, Brother Peachtree Root Fairy, I didn't do that to you."

"I wasn't scolding you! Don't interfere! This dog, when I see him, I'll tear him into eight pieces, sixteen pieces, thirty four pieces..."

"Who're you scolding?" Linghu Chong asked.

"His granny, if I'm not scolding him then who else am I scolding?"

Linghu Chong then pulled up Peachtree Flower Fairy who was now on top of the pile and took out the peach seed. The peach seed was only taken out halfway when Peachtree Flower Fairy started to grumble and mumble. When the seed was taken out, he immediately said, "Big Brother, you said it wrong. Eight pieces multiplied once becomes sixteen pieces, sixteen pieces multiplied once becomes thirty two. How can you say thirty four pieces just then?"

"I like saying thirty four pieces, what's wrong with that? Did I say that I was multiplying it by two? My heart was multiplying it by two then added two to it," Peachtree Root Fairy retorted.

Peachtree Flower Fairy argued, "Why do you multiply it then add it by two? There's no reason for that."

The acupoints on their bodies had not been unsealed yet but as soon as their mouths were free, they immediately argued with each other.

Linghu Chong laughed. "Stop quarrelling. What happened here?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy scolded, "Those two stinky monks, No Commandment and Cannot Have No Commandment, all eighteen of their ancestors are stinky monks."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "Why did you scold Monk No Commandment?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "If I don't scold him then who do I scold? You just went without saying goodbye and Zu Qianqiu had to tell us that you have gone. How could the six of us just stayed and not join the festivity in Songshan? Of course we're going to come. We were just about to get in front of you when we got here and met that stinky Monk Cannot Have No Commandment. He pretended to drink wine with us and he also said that he saw six dogs biting an insect to death to trick us into going outside. Who could've guessed that his Grand Martial Master No Commandment was hiding around the corner and managed to seal our acupoints. Then he stacked us up into a pile and said that if we were going up

to Songshan then we would've spoiled Headmaster Linghu's plan. His granny, how could we have spoiled your plan?"

Linghu Chong understood what was going on and he laughingly said, "This time the Peach Valley Six Fairies have won, and Great Master No Commandment has lost. When you see Monk No Commandment and his disciple the next time, you may not mention this matter ever again, and you also can't fight them. Otherwise, when the world's heroes ask about this, they would find out that Great Master No Commandment lost to the Peach Valley Six Fairies and would lose face."

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Flower Fairy nodded their heads. "The next time we meet these two stinky monks, we'll all pretend that nothing happened so that he and his disciple won't lose face."

Linghu Chong laughed. "The most important thing to do right now is to unseal your brothers' acupoints, you must be suffering by now." He then unsealed Peachtree Flower Fairy's acupoints and closed the door as he went out so that he wouldn't be able to hear the debate that would soon happen between the six brothers.

Zheng E giggled and asked, "Big Martial Brother, what were they doing?"

Qin Juan giggled. "They were making a pyramid."

Peachtree Flower Fairy immediately scolded, "Little nun, nonsense! Who said we were making a pyramid?"

Qin Juan laughed. "I'm not a little nun."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "You're together with a little nun, so you're also little nun."

Qin Juan replied, "Headmaster Linghu is also together with us. Is he also a little nun?"

Zheng E giggled. "You're also together with us, then the six of you are little nuns then."

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Flower Fairy didn't know how to argue back so they started to blame each other for turning them into little nuns.

Linghu Chong, Yihe, and the rest of the disciples waited outside the house for a long time, but the Peach Valley Six Fairies still hadn't come out yet. Linghu Chong pushed the door to go back inside and saw Peachtree Flower Fairy pacing back and forth with a smile on his face while his five brothers' acupoints were still sealed. Linghu Chong laughed loudly and quickly unsealed the five brothers' acupoints, and hastily went out of the house again. He then heard a huge clamouring noise from inside the house. Linghu Chong giggled happily as he walked out of there. After walking for tens of feet and around a few corners, he arrived at a small road besides a farm field. He saw a peach tree with its top full of flower buds waiting for spring time to arrive. He thought, "The flower of a peach tree is so beautiful and delicate, but the Peach Valley Six Fairies are so disorderly and chaotic. They're really different when compared to the real peach flower."

He walked leisurely for a while thinking that the six brothers must have finished fighting by now, and he might as well drink some wine with them. Suddenly, he heard footsteps from behind him and there was a female voice calling out, "Big Brother Linghu!" Linghu Chong turned around and saw that it was Yilin who was coming over. She came over and softly said, "Can I ask you something?"

Linghu Chong smiled. "Of course you can. What's the matter?"

"Who do you like better? Is it Young Lady Ren or your little martial sister?"

Linghu Chong was startled and felt slightly embarrassed. "Why do you suddenly want to ask about this?"

"Martial Sister Yihe and Yiqing told me to ask you about this."

Linghu Chong felt that this was strange. But he just smiled and said, "Why did they want to ask me about this?"

Yilin lowered her head and said, "Big Brother Linghu, I've never talked to anyone about your little martial sister. That

day, Martial Sister Yihe injured Miss Yue and both of them had a dislike for each other. When you asked Martial Sister Yizhen and Yiling to deliver the medicine for her injuries, Huashan School didn't want to accept it and actually chased them out. Everyone was afraid that you would get angry so they didn't talk to you about this. Later on, Martial Sister Yu Sao and Yiwen went up to Huashan to deliver the epistle for your Headmaster Inauguration ceremony but they were actually detained by the Huashan School."

Linghu Chong was startled. "How did you find out?"

Yilin shyly said, "That Tian... Cannot Have No Commandment told me."

"Tian Boguang?"

"That's right. After you went to Dark Wood Cliff, martial sisters asked him to go up Mount Huashan to find out what's going on."

Linghu Chong nodded. "Tian Boguang's qinggong is very good so he wouldn't be easily discovered when spying around. He saw the two martial sisters?"

"He did. But Huashan School guarded them very tightly so he couldn't save them, and they're also not suffering. Also, I wrote to him not to offend the Huashan School or to injure anyone, so that you won't get angry."

Linghu Chong smiled. "You gave him instructions on a paper? That's just like what masters do!"

Yilin's face turned red and she said, "I'm on Xianxing Peak, while he's on Tong Yuan valley. So if there was any matter to tell him then writing to him is the best way. Afterwards, I asked the Buddhist grandma to deliver the letter."

Linghu Chong smiled. "I was just joking. What did Tian Boguang say?"

"He said that he saw a festivity up there. Your former master was getting a son-in-law..." Suddenly, she saw Linghu Chong's expression changed greatly. She panicked and quickly stopped talking. Linghu Chong felt that he was

choking, finding it very difficult to draw his breath. He gasped a few times before saying, "Just say it, it... it doesn't matter." He heard his own voice was grating and it was like it wasn't his own voice talking.

Yilin softly said, "Big Brother Linghu, don't be sad. Martial Sister Yihe and Yiqing all said that even though Young Lady Ren is from the Devil Sect, her personality is nice and her martial art is high. She's ten times better than Miss Yue in everything."

Linghu Chong smiled bitterly. "What do I have to be sad about? Little martial sister has a nice marriage, so I should be happy for her. He... He... Tian Boguang saw my little martial sister..."

Yilin said, "Tian Boguang said the Jade Maiden Peak on Huashan was decorated with lanterns and coloured banners, and it was very lively up there. There was also a lot of people from every sect and every school up there to congratulate them. But Mr. Yue didn't inform our Heng-Shan School and actually treated us like an enemy." Linghu Chong nodded his head. Yilin went on, "Martial Sister Yu Sao and Yiwen went with good intention to Huashan to give them the epistle. It doesn't matter to us that they're not sending gifts or coming to congratulate you for taking up the school's leadership. But what are they doing detaining the messengers we sent to them?" Linghu Chong just stood there expressionless and didn't answer back.

Yilin continued, "Martial Sister Yihe and Yiqing said that Huashan School is acting without reason so we don't have to be polite to them. When we see them at Mount Songshan, we'll ask them about this and tell them to release our people." Linghu Chong again nodded his head. Yilin saw Linghu Chong looking as if he had lost his spirit. She let out a long sigh and softly said, "Big Brother Linghu, take care of yourself." She then slowly walked away.

Linghu Chong saw her gradually getting farther away. He shouted, "Martial Sister!"



Yilin halted and turned her head around.

Linghu Chong asked, "The person my martial sister married is... is..."

Yilin nodded. "Yes! It's that person surnamed Lin." She then quickly walked towards Linghu Chong and pulled on his right sleeve. "Big Brother Linghu, that Lin person isn't better than you. Miss Yue is a muddled person so she agreed to marry him. All the martial sisters are afraid that you'll get angry so they don't dare to tell you about this. But Peach Valley Six Fairies said that my father and Tian Boguang are close to here. When Tian Boguang sees you, he'll probably tell you about this. Even if Tian Boguang doesn't say it, after a few days, we'll arrive at Mount Songshan and you'll then see Miss Yue and her husband there. At that time, you'll see her wearing a set of new clothes and dressed up as a new bride, maybe... maybe... it'll hinder the big matter we're facing. Everyone all said if Miss Ren were beside you, then it'll be good. So all the martial sisters asked me to come and talk to you, and don't let that muddled Miss Yue cloud your judgement." Linghu Chong smiled bitterly and he thought, "They're all so worried about me and afraid that I might be heartbroken. That's why they really looked after me during the journey." Suddenly he felt the back of his hand wet. He lifted his head and saw Yilin was crying. Awkwardly, he asked, "Why... why are you crying?"

Yilin sorrowfully replied, "I see you so heartbroken... Big Brother Linghu, if you want to cry, then... then cry it all out."

Linghu Chong laughed loudly. "Why would I cry? Linghu Chong is an incompetent loafer, and even my master and master-wife despise me and they even expelled me from their school. Little martial sister, how could... how could... Haha, haha!" After he laughed, he ran away on the road towards the mountain. With his running speed, he ran twenty li quickly and arrived at a wild place. When he felt that there was no one nearby, he couldn't suppress his emotion anymore, so he threw himself to the ground and cried loudly.

After crying for some time, he felt his heart getting a bit better. He thought, "If I go back now, both of my eyes would be red. If Yihe and the others see this, they'll laugh at me. It's better if I just go back at night then." But he again thought, "If I don't return for a long time, then they would definitely get worried. When a gentleman wants to cry then he cries, when he wants to laugh then he laughs. The whole world knows that Linghu Chong loves Yue Lingshan. She already abandoned me like she was throwing out worn shoes. If I don't grieve over this, then my feeling was fake."

He immediately ran back to the ruined temple in that city. Yihe, Yiqing, and the other disciples were scattered around the temple searching for him. When they saw him coming back, they were all happy. They had already prepared food and wine on top of the table. Linghu Chong drank himself drunk and slept on the table.

A few days later, they arrived at the foot of Mount Songshan with two days to spare for the meeting. On the morning of the fifteenth of the third month, Linghu Chong led the disciples to make their way up the mountain. Halfway up the mountain, four Songshan disciples met them and very respectfully saluted them. They said, "Songshan's lowly disciples respectfully welcome Heng-Shan School honourable Headmaster Linghu. My humble school's Headmaster Zuo is respectfully waiting on top of the mountain." They also said, "Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools' martial uncles and martial brothers have all arrived yesterday. Songshan School feels very honoured that Headmaster Linghu and martial sisters have come here."

As Linghu Chong kept on going up the mountain, he noticed that the mountain road had been swept clean, and every few li along the way, a few disciples of Songshan had prepared tea and light refreshments to welcome the guests. Songshan School had really prepared everything meticulously, but from this, it could be seen that Zuo Lengchan really must have the headmaster position of the

Five Mountains School and would not allow anyone to hinder him.

As they continued on their journey up the mountain, some more Songshan School's disciples met them to lead their way up the mountain. They said, "Kunlun, Emei, Kongtong, and Qingcheng Schools' headmasters and seniors are coming to Songshan today to participate in the election of the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. Everybody from Kunlun and Qingcheng Schools has all arrived. Headmaster Linghu came just in time, everyone's waiting for your honourable self on top of the mountain." There was a hint of arrogance on their faces, and from the way they spoke, it was obvious that they believed that this headmaster position of the Five Mountains School was secured in the hand of their Songshan School's headmaster.

When they went further up, they suddenly heard a thunderous sound of water. They saw from the top of the cliff two jade dragons hanging down as the two waterfalls poured out and flew out leisurely off the cliff. Everyone was on the side of the waterfall looking up towards the peak. The Songshan School's disciple leading them said, "This is called the View Victory Peak. Headmaster Linghu, what do you think of it compared to the places in Mount Heng-Shan?"

Linghu Chong replied, "Mount Heng-Shan is elegant where as Mount Songshan is grand. Both sceneries are very good."

That person said, "Songshan is placed in the middle of the world during the Tang Dynasty, and they're originally the leader of all the mountains in the realm. Headmaster Linghu, please have a look, with this atmosphere, no wonder that all the emperors from the previous dynasties founded their capitals on the foothill of Mount Songshan." The actual meaning of these words seemed to be that since Mount Songshan was the leader of all the mountains, then Songshan School ought to be the leader of all the other schools.

Linghu Chong smilingly said, "I didn't know that any of the heroes in Jianghu are connected to the government and the emperor. Does Headmaster Zuo often make friends with the government officials?" That person's face turned red and stopped saying anything.

As they kept going up the mountain, the road was becoming more and more dangerous. The Songshan School disciples leading them pointed to a few places and said, "This is the Green Ridge Peak and Green Ridge Plain. This is the Big Iron Bridge Gorge and that's the Little Iron Bridge Gorge." On the right of the Iron Bridge Gorge was a strange stone and on its left was the Ten Thousand Deep Gully, which bottom you couldn't see. A Songshan disciple picked up a piece of big rock and threw it down the gully. The sound of the big rock hitting the side of the gully was like a thunder in the beginning, but as it dropped down the gully, the sound gradually got lighter and lighter until it disappeared.

Yihe said, "May I ask martial brother something? Today, how many people are coming to Songshan?"

That man said, "There are at least two thousand people."

Yihe said, "If you throw down a big rock for every person who comes up the mountain, then after some time, this mountain valley would be filled by your Songshan School." That person just snorted and didn't answer her back.

After they rounded a corner, they saw a thick fog in front of them and there were more than ten people blocking the mountain road. They were all armed. One person gloomily said, "When is Linghu Chong coming up? If you see him then tell us."

Linghu Chong saw the person talking had a face full of beard and his face looked hideous, but both of his eyes were blind. When he looked at the other men with him, each of them was actually also blind. He couldn't help feeling a shiver of fear in his heart. He said loudly, "Linghu Chong is here, what do you want?" When he said 'Linghu Chong is here', the blind men immediately hurled their abuses at him

and waved their weapons about wishing to rush at him. They all scolded, "Linghu Chong you little bastard, you've harmed us greatly, today we'll fight you to the death."

Linghu Chong immediately understood what was going on. He thought, "That night when Huashan School was attacked, I used my newly acquired Dugu Nine Swords' sword art to blind those enemies. I didn't know the origin of those people before, but thinking about it now, they must've been sent by Songshan School. I didn't expect to settle this business today."

He saw that the ground was very dangerous. If they staked their lives in this fight then one of them could grab him and then jump down the Ten Thousand Deep Valley.

He also saw that the Songshan disciple leading the way for them was holding in his laughter and was taking pleasure in his misfortune. He pondered, "I killed a lot of people from Songshan School at the Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley. So we shouldn't be complacent at Mount Songshan today." He then said, "These blind friends, are they the disciples of Songshan School? Sir, could you please tell them to make way?"

That Songshan School's disciple laughingly said, "They're not from my humble school. I don't have any authority over them. Headmaster Linghu can just beat them up."

Suddenly, they heard someone shouted, "Let old man beat you up first then we'll talk." It was Monk No Commandment arriving. Behind him was Cannot Have No Commandment, Tian Boguang. No Commandment strode purposefully, grabbed two Songshan disciples, and threw them over to those blind men while calling out, "Linghu Chong's coming."

Those blind men immediately hacked and slashed their weapons around. But those two Songshan disciples' martial art weren't low and they pulled their swords out as they were flying through the air. They immediately blocked the weapons of those blind men and at the same time called out,

"We're all from Songshan School, quickly get out of the way." Those blind men quickly withdrew their weapons and they were greatly confused. Monk No Commandment rushed up and again grabbed those two Songshan disciples and shouted, "If you don't tell these blind men to make way then I'll throw both of you bastards down the valley." As he said this, he threw the two disciples up into the air. Monk No Commandment's strength of arms was unrivalled and he managed to throw those two Songshan disciples seven to eight feet up in the air. Both of those people cried out wretchedly and they both thought that if they really fell down the Ten Thousand Deep Valley, then their bodies would instantly become minced meat.

Monk No Commandment waited for the two of them to fall back down before he extended his arms and grabbed the back of their necks. "Want to do that again?"

One of the men hastily answered, "No... I don't want to!"

The other Songshan disciple was clever. He loudly shouted, "Linghu Chong, where are you escaping? Blind friends, quickly chase, quickly chase after him!" When the blind men heard this, they all believed him and they immediately started chasing.

Tian Boguang angrily said, "Hey, little kid, are you fit to say Headmaster Linghu's name?" He then gave that man a couple of whacks on the ears and loudly shouted, "Hero Linghu is here! Headmaster Linghu is here! Whichever one of you blind men have guts then come here and receive some sword art lesson from him." Those blind men's anger was roused by the Songshan disciples beforehand and they also remembered of the enmity they had towards Linghu Chong for blinding them, that was why they were patiently waiting on the mountain road. But hearing the wretched shoutings of the two Songshan disciples, they felt fear in their hearts so they were now running up and down the mountain road like headless chickens. After a while, they stood still at a loss of what to do.

Linghu Chong, No Commandment, Tian Boguang, and all the Heng-Shan School's disciples walked past those blind men as they continued their journey up the mountain. Suddenly, they came to a place where they could see two mountain peaks with their tops broken off and naturally made some kind of a gateway. The wind blew through where those broken tops were and the fog caressed their faces as it blew past. No Commandment shouted, "What's this place called? How can it change like that?"

That Songshan disciple bitterly answered, "This is called Facing the Heaven Gate."

Everyone then turned towards the northwest and went up another part of the mountain road. They looked up towards the spacious plain on top of the peak and were able to see countless number of people gathering up there. The Songshan disciples leading the way quickened their steps as they went up the mountain to report. This was followed by the sound of drum welcoming Linghu Chong and his followers to the top of the peak.

Zuo Lengchan was wearing a yellow gown. He led around twenty of his disciples as he came towards Linghu Chong to welcome him. He folded his hands to salute Linghu Chong. Even though Linghu Chong was now the headmaster of Heng-Shan, he had always called him as 'Martial Uncle Zuo'. After all, he was still a generation behind him. Linghu Chong immediately bowed back to return the propriety and he said, "Junior Linghu Chong pays his respect to Songshan's headmaster."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "I haven't seen you for a long time. Brother Linghu seems to be more cheerful. Brother is so handsome and young but you're already leading Heng-Shan School. This has never happened in Wulin before. Congratulations!"

He said all these coldly with a cold face. When he said 'Congratulations', his face was looking lively but there was not a hint of a congratulation in the way he said it. Linghu

Chong understood that he was being sarcastic in saying all these. When he said 'this has never happened in Wulin before', he was actually being sarcastic that a man could become a leader of a bunch of nuns. The words 'handsome and young' also did not have good intentions in them. Linghu Chong replied, "Junior received Dingxian Shi Tai's last wish and became the headmaster of Heng-Shan so that I can avenge the deaths of the two Shi Tai. After I've avenged them, I'll immediately step down and let a worthy person take over." When he said these few words, he was staring at Zuo Lengchan's eyes to see if Zuo Lengchan became ashamed or maybe angry. But nothing changed on Zuo Lengchan's face.

Zuo Lengchan said, "The five mountains sword schools have the same root but different branches. Today when the five schools merge, Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai's blood feud wouldn't be Heng-Shan School's matter only. But it would also become my Five Mountains School's matter. It's very good that Brother Linghu is enthusiastic in this." He stopped for a time. Then he continued, "Brother Tianmen from Taishan, Mr. Mo Da from Hengshan, Mr. Yue from Huashan, and many other friends from Wulin who are attending the ceremony have arrived. Please go ahead to meet them."

Linghu Chong replied, "Yes. Have Shaolin's Great Master Fangzheng and Wudang's Priest Chongxu arrived yet?"

Zuo Lengchan tastelessly answered, "The two of them live very close but with their high position, they wouldn't come here." As he finished saying this, he gave Linghu Chong a stare and his eyes were full of hatred.

Linghu Chong was startled, but he immediately understood. He thought, "When I took up Heng-Shan's leadership, these two seniors of Wulin came personally to congratulate me. But Zuo Lengchan believed that they wouldn't come today. That's why he hates Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu, and he even hates me for that."



At this moment, they suddenly saw two disciples in yellow gown rushing up the mountain road. It seemed that they had an urgent matter to report. Everyone gathering on top of the peak was looking at these two people. Not long after, the two disciples arrived in front of Zuo Lengchan. They reported, "Congratulations Master, Shaolin's Abbot Fangzheng and Wudang School's Headmaster Chongxu are both leading their disciples to come up the mountain."

"They've come?" Zuo Lengchan indifferently asked. "That's very good. I must go down to welcome them." His tone of speech indicated that he didn't care about it that much. But Linghu Chong saw that his gown's sleeve was trembling slightly. After all, a person's happiness is very hard to hide. When news of Shaolin's Great Master Fangzheng and Wudang's Priest Chongxu arrival was heard, it created a sensation amongst the crowd on top of the mountain. A lot of people followed Zuo Lengchan in going down the mountain to welcome them. Linghu Chong and his Heng-Shan disciples moved to one side of the road letting those people went down.

They saw Taishan School's Priest Tianmen, Hengshan School's Mr. Mo Da, Beggar Clan's clan leader, Qingcheng School Pine Wind Monastery's Priest Yu Canghai, and all the other seniors had all arrived on the mountain. Linghu Chong saluted many people one by one when he suddenly saw a group of people coming around a corner. They were his Master, Master-Wife, and the martial brothers and sisters of the Huashan School. His heart was pained in seeing them. He quickly went up to them and kowtowed to his Master. "Linghu Chong pays his respect to two honourables."

Yue Buqun leaned to one side and coldly said, "Why does Headmaster Linghu give me such a big propriety? Isn't this a strange joke?"

Linghu Chong stood up after giving his respect and stepped back. Madam Yue's eyes were red as she said, "I heard that you've now become the Headmaster of Heng-Shan

School. From now on, you can't make trouble anymore, and you must also settle down."

Yue Buqun coldly laughed. "Him? Not creating trouble? That'll be the day when the sun rises from the west. The first day he became headmaster, Heng-Shan School accepted thousands of people from the unorthodox path, isn't that enough trouble already? I also heard he joined hands with that Devil Sect's Ren Woxing to kill Dongfang Bubai and let Ren Woxing regained the throne of the Devil Sect. Heng-Shan School's headmaster unexpectedly took part in such a big matter for the Devil Sect, can't this be called creating trouble?"

"Yes, yes," Linghu Chong replied. He didn't want to talk about this matter so he changed to another subject, "At the meeting on Songshan today, Martial Uncle Zuo's intention is to merge the five mountains sword schools into one to make the Five Mountains School. What do the two honourables think of this?"

Yue Buqun asked, "What's your intention?"

"Disciple..."

Yue Buqun smiled and hastily interrupted, "This word 'disciple' doesn't need to be mentioned. If you still remembered those past days in Huashan, then... then..." He then deeply hummed looking like it wasn't easy for him to say what he wanted to say. From the day when he was expelled from the Huashan School, Linghu Chong had never seen Yue Buqun looking so pleased at him. Linghu Chong hastily said, "If you have any order, disciple... Junior will obey it."

Yue Buqun nodded his head. "I don't have any order, but the martial art people of my generation are especially sensitive about distinguishing between the orthodox and demonical paths. When that day I didn't allow you to stay on Huashan anymore, it wasn't because your Master-Wife and I were cruel-hearted, or because we didn't want to forgive you for your faults. It's just that you violated Wulin's biggest

taboo, so even though I've raised you since you were young and that you're like a son to me, I still couldn't be selfish."

When Linghu Chong heard this, he became tearful. He chokingly said, "Even if my body turned to dust and my bones broken to pieces, it'll still be very hard for me to repay Master's and Master-Wife's kindness."

Yue Buqun lightly patted his shoulder to comfort him and then said, "That day at Shaolin Temple, we fought for a while. I used a few sword moves with deep meanings behind them, hoping that you would turn around and rejoin my Huashan School. But you were obstinate and made me really sad."

Linghu Chong replied, "That day at Shaolin Temple I committed an evil act, disciple should die for it. It's my biggest wish to again rejoin Master's school."

Yue Buqun smiled. "I'm afraid these words you said are somewhat hypocritical. You're already the headmaster of another school, command a lot of people, and have a lot of responsibility. You're already comfortable in that position now, why would you want to rejoin our school? Also, looking at your martial art now, how can I still be your master?" After he said this, he gave a glance to Madam Yue.

When Linghu Chong heard Yue Buqun's tone was sincere and it seemed that he wanted to take him back as a disciple again, he was extremely happy. He immediately knelt down and said, "Master, Master-Wife, disciple has offended you greatly. From now on, I will rectify my wrongs, obey master's order, and follow Master-Wife's instructions. I hope that Master and Master-Wife would be merciful and accept me back into Huashan School." At this time, he heard people clamouring to come up the mountain road. Those people were accompanying Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu up the mountain.

Yue Buqun lowered his voice and said, "Get up, we'll slowly talk about this later."

Linghu Chong was exulted and kowtowed a few times. "Thank you Master, Master-Wife!" He then stood up.

Madam Yue was sad and happy at the same time. "Your little martial sister and your martial brother Lin, they got... got married on Huashan last month." Her tone of voice sounded worried. She was afraid that Linghu Chong only wanted to rejoin the Huashan School because of Yue Lingshan, and when he heard that she had already gotten married, he might shout out in grief and be inconsolable.

Linghu Chong was pained to hear this and he slightly tilted his head to look for Yue Lingshan. He saw her already dressed up in a beautiful gown as a young married woman. However, her appearance did not seem to have changed at all. She didn't have the glowing and healthy look that newly married young ladies have.

Her eyes met Linghu Chong's and suddenly her whole face was red, and she quickly dropped her head down. Linghu Chong felt as if a big hammer had just hit his chest and all of a sudden, he saw stars in his eyes. His body faltered and he couldn't stand straight. Suddenly he heard someone whispered in his ear, "Headmaster Linghu, you came from far away but you arrived here first. Shaolin Temple and the Courtyard of Towering Meditation are only a few feet away but I arrived late." Linghu Chong felt that someone was holding his left arm supporting him. Once he recovered, he saw Great Master Fangzheng smiling besides him. He hastily replied, "Yes, Yes!", paid his respect and stepped aside.

Zuo Lengchan announced in a clear voice, "Everyone, there's no need to give too much propriety. Otherwise, with the thousands of people we have here, we still won't finish paying our respect to each other until tomorrow. Please enter the Courtyard of Meditation now."

The top of Mount Songshan used to be called Eji and the Courtyard of Towering Meditation was originally a Buddhist temple. But in the last one hundred years, it had been turned into habitable quarters for the Songshan School's headmaster. Even though Zuo Lengchan's name contains the

word 'meditation' in it, he was never a disciple of Buddhism while his martial art was closer to Taoism.

The crowd went into the Courtyard of Meditation. Inside, there was a forest of ancient pines in the middle of the courtyard, with a hall which did not look like a Buddhist hall at all. Even though the hall was extremely large, it still couldn't be compared to the Great Hero Precious Hall at the Shaolin Temple. Not a thousand people had entered the courtyard when it was already full of people and there was no way to fit more people in.

Zuo Lengchan said in a loud voice, "Today's gathering of our five mountains sword schools is blessed by the presence of all the friends from the orthodox path. This is beyond all my expectations so the supply we've provided isn't sufficient and our reception is slow. So please don't blame us for this."

Someone from the crowd shouted, "That's alright. But there are too many people here so there's no more room to stand."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "If we go up two hundred more steps, there's a place where emperors in the ancient times used to worship the heaven and earth. The space up there is wide and would be very convenient for us. But we're only common people, so if the news of us holding a meeting in that place of worship spread out then people will ridicule us for being conceited."

In ancient times, the emperors commended their own achievements by frequently worshipping the heaven and earth in either Mount Taishan or Mount Songshan, and offered sacrifices during these events. This event was usually a grand occasion for the whole country. But from amongst these Jianghu's heroes, who understood about the matter of 'worshipping heaven and earth'? They only felt crowded and stuffy inside that big hall. Let alone sitting, they weren't even able to breathe freely. One by one, they were saying, "We're not rebelling to become the emperor<sup>2</sup>. Since such a place exist, why don't we go there? The person besides me talk a

lot, damn it!" As they were grumbling, there were already people rushing out of the courtyard.

Zuo Lengchan said, "Alright, then let's go and have a look at the worshipping place."

Linghu Chong thought, "Zuo Lengchan is very meticulous in his planning, so how could he have let all these people to be so crowded in here? What's his reason? He himself wants to go to the worshipping place to hold the gathering but he's too embarrassed to say it himself so he's letting other people instigate it." His thought continued, "What kind of place is this place of worship? He said that it was related to emperors, and now he's leading everyone to go up there. Could it be that he really aspires to be an emperor? Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu said that he has great ambition and that once he's combined the five mountains sword schools, he would then move to exterminate the Sun Moon Sect. Then he would continue on annexing Shaolin and Wudang. Hey, hey, Dongfang Bubai and he actually have the same goal, 'Long live the Chief, unifies the Jianghu'!"

Linghu Chong followed the people and arrived below the place of worship. He again thought, "Hearing what Master said, it seems that he's willing to forgive my faults and allow me to return to Huashan. Why was Master so severe before but being so nice today? He must've investigated and found out that my conduct in Heng-Shan is very proper and doesn't besmirch the name of the Heng-Shan School, so he must be really happy. Little martial sister has also gotten married to Martial Brother Lin, so Master and Master-Wife must be feeling sorry for me. Also Master-Wife must've persuaded Master many times till he finally changed his attitude. Today, Zuo Lengchan will try his hardest in annexing the four schools, and since Master is the headmaster of Huashan School, he will resist this with all of his power. He treats me very well so that I may ally with him and together protect the Huashan School. I'll do my best today to not disappoint his hope, and at the same time protect Heng-Shan School."

The place of worship was entirely constructed out of granite where each big rock there was chiselled until it was completely flat. Imagining the past when the emperor offered sacrifices here, Linghu Chong wondered how many stonemason the emperor employed to construct this place. As he scanned the area, he saw that some of the stones were newly chiselled. Even though there was moss on them already, he could still see that they were new. It was apparent that with the passage of time, this place of worship may have been quite damaged. Zuo Lengchan must have ordered his people to repair the place and had intentionally covered up those repairs so that they would not look obvious. But by doing so, it had instead looked as if he was up to no good.

As soon as the crowd arrived at this peak of Mount Songshan, they all felt invigorated. This summit stood tallest of all the other peaks around it. At that time, the sky was a clear blue without a single cloud to be seen. Linghu Chong gazed to the north and was able to see the high banks of Yumen and the Yellow River looking like a piece of thread. On the west, he could see the imperial city of Luoyang, while on the southeast, he saw layers upon layers of mountains.

He then saw three old men pointing to the south. One of them said, "That is the Big Bear Peak, that is the Small Bear Peak, those two peaks standing close together are the Dual Jade Peak, and the three peaks piercing through the cloud is called Three Outstanding Peaks."

Another old man said, "That mountain peak is the Shaoshi Mountain where the Shaolin Temple is. That day when I was at the Shaolin temple, I felt as if I was so high above, but looking from here, Shaolin temple is actually below Mount Songshan." The three old men laughed at this. Linghu Chong saw from the way these three old men dressed up that they weren't from Songshan School. But judging from their allegory of the mountains, they seem to be embellishing Songshan and belittling Shaolin. Looking at the

brightness of these three people's eyes, he deduced that they have powerful internal energies. It seemed that Zuo Lengchan had arranged many helpers for himself today, so if something were to change, they would have to contend with more than just the people from Songshan School.

He then saw Zuo Lengchan inviting Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu to go up to the place of worship. Fangzheng laughingly said, "The two of us are only two useless outsiders. We've come today just to offer our congratulations and to attend the ceremony, so there's no need for us to go up the stage and disgrace ourselves."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "Great Master Fangzheng is talking like you're an outsider to us."

Chongxu said, "All the visitors have already arrived. Headmaster Zuo, please go ahead with the big event, there's no need keep us two old chaps company."

Zuo Lengchan said, "I'll comply with your request then." He then cupped his fist to the two of them and went up to the place of worship. He'd walked up tens of steps and there was still around ten feet to the top when he stopped and announced in a loud voice, "Friends, please!"

The top of Mount Songshan was really windy and the crowd was scattered all over the place enjoying the scenery. But Zuo Lengchan's words were heard clearly by everyone up there. Everyone turned their heads around and started to gather closer, surrounding the worship place. Zuo Lengchan cupped his fist and said, "I appreciate all the friends here who have come to grace Mount Songshan with your presence. All the friends here must have heard already that today is the good day that my five mountains sword schools will join our efforts together and will become one school."

Hundreds of people on the base of the worship place shouted, "Yes, yes, congratulations, congratulations!"

"Everyone, please take a seat!" Zuo Lengchan said.

Everyone immediately sat on the ground, and the disciples from each school and sect sat together with their



headmaster. Zuo Lengchan said, "Our five mountains sword schools have the same root, different branches. We've been allied for more than a hundred years and we're just like a family already. I have been the chief of the five schools for many years already. But in these last few years, many big events have occurred in Wulin. So the seniors from the five mountains sword schools and I consulted each other and we all felt that if we don't merge into one school, then there would be a day when we encounter a big problem that we couldn't handle."

Suddenly, they heard someone who coldly interjected from the base of the worship place, "Which school's seniors did Chief Zuo consulted with? How come I don't know about this matter?" The one who said this was Hengshan School's headmaster Mr. Mo Da. As soon as he said this, it was apparent that Hengshan School disapproved of this merger.

Zuo Lengchan replied, "I just said before, many big events have occurred in Wulin which led to the conclusion that the five schools must merge into one. Amongst these big events is the inter-school killings of each other in spite of our alliance. Mr. Mo Da, my Songshan School's disciple, the Great Songyang Palm, Martial Brother Fei lost his life outside the city of Hengshan. There were people who observed this and said that you were the one who did this, is this true?"

Mr. Mo Da was startled and he thought, "When I killed that Fei, there was only Martial Brother Liu, Qu Yang, Linghu Chong, a little nun from Heng-Shan School, and Qu Yang's granddaughter there. Three of these people have already died. Could it be that Linghu Chong accidentally mentioned about it after drinking some wine? Or maybe that little nun isn't too experienced and divulged this secret?" At this time, the thousands of eyes underneath the worship place were all looking at Mr. Mo Da's face. Mr. Mo Da remained calm and composed; he shook his head and said, "This matter did not happen! How could I have killed the Great Songyang Palm with my limited skills?"

Zuo Lengchan coldly laughed. "If the fight was fair and one on one, Mr. Mo Da might not necessarily have been able to kill my martial brother Fei. But if it was an ambush, and you're using your Hengshan School's ever changing phantasmal sword moves, even masters would find it hard to fight against. We looked at the injuries on the corpse of Martial Brother Fei, but someone already ruined it. But the placements of the sword stab couldn't change. Instead of covering up the evidence, isn't this revealing it instead?"

Mr. Mo Da was startled and he shook his head while thinking, "You're guessing foolishly. How can I admit that?" He was thinking that Zuo Lengchan was relying on the sword injuries placements on Fei Bin's corpse to say this and no one had actually divulged this secret. So he decided never to admit this to Zuo Lengchan. But after this, there would always be enmity between Songshan School and Hengshan School. Also, it was hard to say whether they would be able to go down Mount Songshan alive today. Zuo Lengchan continued, "This merger is the biggest matter that has happened to our five mountains sword schools since each of the school's inception. Mr. Mo Da, we're both the headmasters of a school and we both know which matter is important, and our grudge towards each other is very light. If my five schools benefit from it, then everyone's grudges would be forced to be put aside. Brother Mo, you don't have to worry too much about this matter. Martial Brother Fei is my martial brother, but after the five schools are merged, Brother Mo and I will also become martial brothers. The dead is already dead, and why would the living be killing each other?"

His speech was gentle, but the actual meaning behind his words was very threatening. The meaning behind his words was, if Mr. Mo Da agreed to the merging of the schools, then the matter of killing Fei Bin would just be washed away. Otherwise, the matter would have to be settled. Both of his eyes were staring at Mr. Mo Da. He asked, "South Mountain

Hengshan School has no objection to the merging of the schools. Priest Tianmen of the Taishan School on the east mountain, what does your noble school think of this?"

Priest Tianmen stood up and said with a booming voice, "It's been three hundred years since Priest Dongling founded the Taishan School. Poor priest doesn't have the virtue and ability to advance the prestige of the Taishan School. But the school's history of three hundred years, it cannot end at my hand no matter what. This matter of merging the schools, I would never agree to it."

From amongst the Taishan School, a priest with a white beard stood up and said loudly, "Martial Nephew Tianmen, you're wrong. The Taishan School's four generations consist of more than four hundred people. This great benefit to everyone in the school couldn't be thwarted just by your own personal selfishness."

This white-bearded priest with a desiccated face had a loud and strong voice. There were people who recognised him and whispered, "He's Yujizi, he's the martial uncle of Priest Tianmen."

Priest Tianmen's face was originally looking ruddy, but after hearing what Yujizi said, his face turned really red and he said loudly, "Martial Uncle, what do you mean by that? Ever since Martial Nephew became the headmaster of Taishan, which matter have I done which is not in the best interest of the school? I'm opposed to the merger of the five schools in order to preserve the Taishan School. How can it be because I'm selfish?"

Yujizi laughed condescendingly and said, "The merger of the five schools will greatly flourish the five mountains schools. Which disciples in the five mountains schools wouldn't benefit from this merger? Martial Nephew, you can't be the headmaster of our school anymore."

Priest Tianmen got even more indignant when he heard this. He shouted, "What's this got to do with me being the

headmaster? No matter what anyone said, Taishan School will not be annexed while I'm in charge."

Yujizi said, "What you said is really beautiful, but inside your heart, you actually don't want to relinquish your position of headmaster."

Priest Tianmen indignantly said, "You really think that I'm that selfish?" He extended his hand and took out a black dagger out of his bosom. He then shouted, "From now on, I'm no longer the headmaster. If you want to be the headmaster, then come and do it!"

Everyone saw that this black dagger looked ordinary but all the seniors of the five mountains sword schools knew that it was a relic from the time when Priest Dongling started the Taishan School. This dagger had become the symbol of Taishan School's headmaster and had been passed down from headmaster to headmaster for the last three hundred years.

Yujizi retreated a step and coldly laughed. "You're willing to part with it?"

Priest Tianmen angrily replied, "Why wouldn't I be willing to part with it?"

"Alright, then give it to me!" As he said this, he extended his right hand and grabbed the dagger in Priest Tianmen's hand. Priest Tianmen didn't expect that Yujizi would actually grab the dagger from his hand. So as he was startled, the dagger was already snatched by Yujizi. Without thinking too much, he pulled out the long sword hanging on his waist.

Yujizi flew back and two green blurs were seen as two old priests blocked Priest Tianmen's way with their swords. They shouted, "Tianmen, you're defying your senior. Have you forgotten our school's commandment?"

Priest Tianmen saw that these two people were his martial uncles, Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi. His whole body shivered as he called out, "Martial uncles, you saw it with your own eyes, Yuji... .. What Martial Uncle Yuji did just a moment ago!"

Yuyinzi said, "We've seen it with our own eyes. You gave the school's headmaster position to Martial Brother Yuji. Abdicating your position to someone more worthy is a very good thing to do."

Yuqingzi said, "Since Martial Brother Yuji is your martial uncle, who is now also your headmaster, you've committed a very big sin by pulling out your sword to kill him."

Priest Tianmen saw that his two martial uncles were being unreasonably favourable towards Yujizi and were also unexpectedly finding faults with what he did. In an uncontrollable rage, he shouted, "I only said that in anger. How could the headmaster position be passed down so... so quickly, damn... damn it, I would never have passed it down to Yuji." In his fit of anger, he unexpectedly said some foul language.

Yuyinzi shouted, "Are you fit to be the headmaster after saying such kind of language?"

From amongst the Taishan School's group, a middle-aged priest stood up and said loudly, "Our school's headmaster has always been my master. What kind of tricks are martial uncles playing here?" This middle-aged priest had a Taoist name of Jianchu, and he was Priest Tianmen's second disciple.

This was followed by another person who stood up and shouted, "Martial Brother Tianmen already gave the headmaster position to my master. The thousands of people on top of Mount Songshan here saw and heard what happened. How could it be false? Martial Brother Tianmen said just a moment ago: 'From now on, I'm no longer the headmaster. If you want to be the headmaster, then come and do it!' You didn't hear it?" The one who said this was Yujizi's disciple.

More than a hundred people from the Taishan School's group started chanting, "Old headmaster abdicated, new headmaster takes over! Old headmaster abdicated, new headmaster takes over!"

Priest Tianmen was the most senior disciple and he also had the most reputation in the school, but five or six of his martial uncles secretly plotted against him and suddenly went against him together. So from the two hundred Taishan School's people who had come up to Mount Songshan today, more than one hundred and sixty of them were his enemy. Yujizi lifted the iron dagger high above his head and said, "This is Grand-Master Dongling's divine weapon. Grand-Master's last words were: 'Seeing this dagger is like seeing Dongling'. Should we listen to Grand-Master's last word?"

More than one hundred priests loudly shouted, "Headmaster is right!" There was also people calling out, "Disciple Tianmen is rebelling, and is not adhering to our school's rules. He deserves to be punished."

When Linghu Chong saw what was happening, he was guessing that all these people were secretly put here by Zuo Lengchan. Priest Tianmen had an irritable nature and could easily be stirred up. With just a few words, he could become extremely angry. At this moment, hearing the loud voice of his enemy, Tianmen felt he couldn't restrain himself anymore. But even though he was extremely enraged at the moment, there was nothing that he could do. Linghu Chong gazed at where Huashan School was crowded together and saw his master standing with his hands behind his back. His master's face had no expression whatsoever. Linghu Chong thought, "Yujizi and his people set this up, and Master greatly objected to this. But he doesn't want to meddle in this and seems to be just calmly observing what's going on for now. I'll just follow his lead then."

Yujizi waved his left hand a few times and suddenly around one hundred and sixty priests from Taishan School dispersed and pulled their long swords out. They encircled the remaining fifty plus priests. All the priests encircled were Tianmen's disciples. Priest Tianmen indignantly bellowed, "You really want to fight? Let's fight to the death."

Yujizi said clearly, "Tianmen listen! Taishan School's headmaster has an order: Drop your sword and surrender. Do you submit to Grand-Master Dongling's dagger?"

Tianmen angrily replied, "Pei! Who said you're our school's headmaster?"

"Tianmen's disciples, this matter has nothing to do with you, throw down your weapons and surrender yourself! We won't look into this matter further, otherwise you'll be punished heavily," Yujizi called out.

Priest Jianchu shouted, "If you can promise to Grand-Master's dagger that you would never let the hard work of Grand-Master in establishing the Taishan School be wiped out, then all of us will support you in becoming headmaster. But if once you've become headmaster, you immediately sell our school to Songshan School, then you'll become the greatest sinner in our school. And when you die, you won't have face to meet Grand-Master."

Yuyinzi said, "You little kid, do you think you're good enough to talk to your seniors from the 'Yu' generation? When the five schools merge, wouldn't Songshan School's name also be wiped out? Five Mountains School, these two words of 'Five Mountains' include Taishan in it, what's not good about that?"

Priest Tianmen replied, "You were all secretly sowing discord and have all been bought by Zuo Lengchan. Hng, hng! If you want to kill then go ahead. But if you want me to promise to surrender to Songshan, I will never do it."

Yujizi said, "You're all refusing to obey's Headmaster's dagger! Careful! You'll die shortly and you will die unburied."

Priest Tianmen said, "Disciples loyal to Taishan School, today we'll die fighting and spill our blood on Songshan."

The disciples standing around him answered, "We'll fight to the death and will never surrender."

Even though their number was small, each of their faces showed their resolve. If Yujizi told his men to attack, it wasn't going to be quick in killing all of them. Also, the thousands of

good heroes, Shaolin School's Great Master Fangzheng, Wudang School's Priest Chongxu, and the other senior masters around the base of the worship place would never allow them to take advantage of this and allow the massacre of their own martial brothers to happen. Yujizi, Yuqingzi, Yuyinzi, and their men were watching carefully, not knowing what to do.

Suddenly, someone from far to the left lazily said, "Old man has walked everywhere in this realm, I've also seen a lot of good heroes. But I rarely see a dog who disclaims what he says immediately after he said it."

Everyone looked at where the voice was coming from and they saw a person wearing hemp clothes leaning besides a big rock. His left hand was holding a big bamboo hat and he was using it to fan himself. This person looked slim, his two eyes were squinted, and his face was showing a disapproving expression. No one knew who this person was, and they also didn't know who he was scolding. They heard him continued, "You clearly already gave your headmaster position to someone else, could it be what you were saying was bullshit? Priest Tianmen, your name has this character 'Tian', I'm afraid we should change it into the word 'Shit'. Then it'll sound right." Yujizi and his men understood that he was helping them, so they all laughed.

Tianmen indignantly said, "It's my own Taishan School's matter! Outsiders don't need to worry about it."

That hemp clothed man lazily replied, "When old man sees a matter that's not pleasing to my eyes, then I'll definitely worry about it. Today is the five mountains sword schools' good day for merger, but instead you, ox-nosed priest, pulled out your sword and created trouble here, making people lose interest. This is really bullshit."

Suddenly, they saw a flash as that hemp-clothed man jumped forward and rapidly charged at the encirclement of Yujizi and his men. He slashed the bamboo hat he was holding in his left hand down on Priest Tianmen's head.



Unexpectedly, Priest Tianmen didn't block this strike. Instead he pointed his sword towards that person's chest who then hastily dropped down to the ground and rushed underneath Priest Tianmen's legs. He slapped his right hand on the ground to turn his body around. Then with a 'hu' sound, he kicked out repeatedly at the back of Priest Tianmen's body. These few moves displayed by that person were extremely weird. Every one of the heroes gathered on the mountaintop was skilled, but they had never heard of any of these moves before, let alone seen it. Tianmen couldn't guard against this attack and his acupoints were hit. The disciples around Tianmen immediately stabbed their swords towards that person. That man just laughed loudly and grabbed Priest Tianmen's back to block the incoming swords which forced the disciples to withdraw their swords in a hurry. That man shouted, "Throw down your swords, or I'll twist off this ox-nosed's head." As he said this, his right hand clutched the top of Tianmen's head.

Tianmen's martial art was useless now as his movement was controlled by that person, and he couldn't move at all. His once red face had now turned pale. Looking at the situation, it's clear that the hemp-clothed man only had to apply some power into his right hand to twist Tianmen's head around and break his neck. Jianchu said, "You suddenly ambushed us. This is not what heroes do. What's your name?" That person used his left hand to smack Priest Tianmen's ear and then lazily said, "Whoever is rude to me then I'll hit his master."

When Priest Tianmen's disciples saw that their honoured master was being insulted, they were startled and angry at the same time. Each of them only needed to pierce their long swords towards the hemp-clothed man at the same time, then that man would instantaneously become a hedgehog. But Priest Tianmen was still under his control so none of them dared to move for fear that their actions might hurt their master. A young man scolded, "You dog..." That man again

lifted his hand and slapped Tianmen's ear. He then said, "You're a disciple from the school. How can you still say such foul language?"

Suddenly, Priest Tianmen cried out loudly as he suddenly turned around and came face to face with that hemp-clothed person. Blood spouted out of Priest Tianmen's mouth. The hemp-clothed person was startled and wanted to take his hand off Priest Tianmen, but it was too late. All of a sudden, that person's whole head and face became drenched with blood from Priest Tianmen, while at the same time, both of Priest Tianmen's hands turned around and grabbed his neck. With a sharp sound, that person's neck was snapped. Priest Tianmen then threw that person's body away, which landed tens of feet away. Priest Tianmen now looked completely tall and strong, and at the same time looked strangely powerful with his face full of blood. Everyone who saw him was terrified. After some time, he violently shouted and dropped to the ground. At first, he was unexpectedly attacked by that person who used many weird moves, then he was repeatedly insulted. So he couldn't hold back his anger anymore and was willing to lose his life, so he exerted his inner energy and forcefully broke his meridian. By doing that, he managed to open up his sealed acupoints, and then he exerted himself and killed that person. But his own meridian was broken so he wouldn't be able to live any more as well. Tianmen's disciples cried out "Master!" and rushed over to support him. But when they saw that he had already died, they all started scolding loudly.

From amongst the crowd, someone suddenly said, "Headmaster Zuo, you ordered that 'Green Ocean Owl' to deal with Priest Tianmen. Isn't that too much?"

Everyone turned around to look at the person who said this. What they saw was a rustic old man who some people knew of as He Sanqi, who usually went around selling wonton in the markets around the cities. As for that person who was violently killed by Priest Tianmen, no one knew who he was

or where he came from. They only heard that He Sanqi called him as 'Green Ocean Owl'. Yet, still not many people knew who 'Green Ocean Owl' was.

Zuo Lengchan said, "What a joke. This is the first time that I have met Brother Ji. How can you say that I ordered him to do this?"

He Sanqi said, "Perhaps Headmaster Zuo hasn't been acquainted with 'Green Ocean Owl' for long, but you're well acquainted with this person's master 'White Malignant Star'."

When the word 'White Malignant Star' came out of He Sanqi's mouth, the crowd uttered their surprise. Linghu Chong vaguely remembered that many years ago Master-Wife had mentioned this name: 'White Malignant Star'. At that time, Yue Lingshan was only around six to seven years old and she was crying incessantly. Madam Yue tried to frighten her by saying, "If you keep crying then 'White Malignant Star' will come and take you away." When Linghu Chong asked who this 'White Malignant Star' was, Madam Yue replied, "'White Malignant Star' is an evil person. He likes to eat small kids who love to cry. This person has no nose, and there's only two holes on his face, just like a piece of board." At that time, Yue Lingshan was scared by this and stopped crying. As Linghu Chong thought of the past, he gazed at Yue Lingshan and saw her staring at a distant mountain peak looking as if she was pondering something. Scowling at times, she seemed to be worried about something. It was obvious that she didn't recall of this 'White Malignant Star' and that she had long ago forgotten about it. Linghu Chong thought, "Little martial sister has just gotten married, and she loves Martial Brother Lin a lot. What unpleasant matter is she thinking of? Could it be that they're fighting at the moment?" He saw Lin Pingzhi standing besides her and his face looked quite weird. He seemed to be smiling and yet not smiling, and he seemed to be angry but not quite angry. Linghu Chong was again surprised, "What kind of expression is that? On whose face did I see this

expression before?" But he couldn't remember where he had seen this kind of expression before.

He then heard Zuo Lengchan reply, "Brother Yuji, congratulations on becoming Taishan School's headmaster. Regarding this five sword schools merger, what's Brother's esteemed opinion on this?" Zuo Lengchan didn't answer He Sanqi's question but instead went around it. Then this meant that tacitly he was not disputing that he knew of 'White Malignant Star'. White Malignant Star's evil name had been known for around twenty to thirty years, but the number of people who had actually seen him or suffered under his hands was not many. It seemed that his evil reputation mainly came from his ugly appearance. However, from looking at his disciple Green Ocean Owl's behaviour, it was obvious that this master and disciple didn't belong to the orthodox school.

Yujizi grasped the dagger in his hand and was feeling proud of himself. He happily replied, "The merger of the five mountains sword schools benefits everyone of us in the five schools, and there's no harm in it at all. It's only that Priest Tianmen was very selfish and didn't think of the welfare of everyone, so he went against the idea. Chief Zuo, as I'm the headmaster of Taishan School now, I wholeheartedly approve of the merger of the five schools. Everyone in Taishan School is now under your command and will flourish under the Five Mountains School's family. If anyone tried to obstruct this, then my Taishan School will be the first one to go against them."

More than a hundred people from Taishan School boomed their answer, "Taishan School whole heartedly agrees to the merger. If anyone absurdly objects to this, Taishan School swears to go against them." These people answered together and loudly. Even though there weren't many of them, their voices were firm and reverberated throughout the mountaintop. Linghu Chong thought, "It's obvious they've practised this before hand. Otherwise, even if everyone of

them agreed to the merger, their words won't be exactly the same from each other." Also hearing the respectful tone that Yujizi used when addressing Zuo Lengchan, he guessed that if Zuo Lengchan had not secretly given him a payoff before, then Zuo Lengchan must have used some kind of violent method to control him. When Priest Tianmen's disciples saw that their master had died violently and that things were out of their control, they were forced to sit there silently. Some of them grinded their teeth and cursed silently, while a few clenched their fists tightly as their faces filled with grief and indignation.

Zuo Lengchan said loudly, "Hengshan and Taishan Schools have already approved of the merger, so it seems that all our schools will be merged very soon. There's only benefit for everyone in the merging of the schools. There's no harm in it. So my Songshan School will also follow your decision and celebrate this together."

Linghu Chong coldly thought in his heart, "You certainly can talk very beautifully. All these matters were setup by you, but you're actually making it sound as if you're just following their ideas."

He heard Zuo Lengchan continue, "Among the five schools, three schools have already agreed to the merger. What does Heng-Shan School think of this? Heng-Shan School's previous headmaster, Dingxian Shi Tai, had repeatedly discussed about this matter with me. She completely endorsed this merger. Dingjing, Dingyi Shi Tai also agreed with this." From among the black-uniformed disciples of the Heng-Shan School, one disciple cried out in a clear voice, "Headmaster Zuo, what you said was wrong. Before our headmaster and two martial uncles passed away, they hated this idea of a merger and completely opposed it. As a result of opposing this merger, the three honourables met their misfortunes. How can you pass off your own opinion as that of the three honourables?" Everyone turned their heads to look who was speaking, and saw a round-faced

girl. This young lady who was very good in talking was Zheng E. She was still very young so most of the people from the other schools didn't recognise her.

Zuo Lengchan replied, "The martial art of your master, Dingxian Shi Tai, is high, and her experience is really out of the ordinary. She's in fact the greatest person among everyone in our five mountains sword schools, and I admired her very much. But it's a pity that they were killed in Shaolin Temple. If she was still alive today, then she would know what is right or wrong in today's gathering." He paused for a time before continuing, "That day when I was discussing the merger with Dingxian, Dingjing, and Dingyi Shi Tai, I mentioned about this matter already. Actually it didn't matter if this merger comes to fruition or not. But if the merger actually goes through then I would have definitely asked Dingxian Shi Tai to be the leader of the combined schools. At that time, Dingxian Shi Tai was being humble and declined, but I would definitely have supported her fully. Later on, for some unknown reason, Dingxian Shi Tai firmly declined this idea. Ai, what a pity, what a pity, such a hero unexpectedly passed away when her service here isn't done yet. Her death at the Shaolin Temple really made people sad." He had now mentioned Shaolin Temple twice in his speech, as he implicitly put the responsibility of Dingxian Shi Tai's death on Shaolin Temple. He was implying that even though the murderer might not have been someone from Shaolin School, there were many martial art masters at Shaolin who were capable of killing these two masters. Also, even if Shaolin School didn't plot the demise of the Shi Tai, they had let their murderers escape and were negligent in their responsibility to protect the people inside the temple.

Suddenly, someone with a crude voice said, "What Headmaster Zuo said was wrong. That day, Dingxian Shi Tai told me, she actually wanted to choose you to become the headmaster of the five mountains sword schools."

Zuo Lengchan felt really happy. He took a look at that person and saw that person had a horse face, mouse eyes, and looked very weird. He didn't know who that person was but since he was wearing a black gown, it indicated that he was from the Heng-Shan School. Besides him were five more people with similar appearances, wearing similar gowns, but Zuo Lengchan didn't know that they were the Peach Valley Six Fairies. Even though Zuo Lengchan felt exulted, his face stayed calm and collected.

"Honourable Brother, what's your name? Even though Dingxian Shi Tai had said that at that time, I still couldn't be compared to her. I would never be able to be as good as her."

The person who spoke out before was Peachtree Root Fairy. He now loudly replied, "I'm Peachtree Root Fairy. These five people are all my brothers."

"I have heard of your illustrious name for a long time," Zuo Lengchan replied.

"Which illustrious name have you heard of me? Did you hear about my powerful martial art or my vast knowledge?" Peachtree Root Fairy asked.

Zuo Lengchan thought, "So these six idiots were the ones who ripped Cheng Buyou apart." But thinking that Peachtree Root Fairy had just supported him, he said, "The six of you have powerful martial arts and vast knowledge. I've heard of both."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "There's nothing great about our martial arts. But if the six of us teamed up together, we would be better than Chief Zuo by a bit. However, if we're fighting one on one, then we lack by a lot."

Peachtree Flower Fairy added, "But with regards to knowledge, we're way better than Chief Zuo."

Zuo Lengchan snorted and replied, "Really?"

"I'm not wrong at all. That's what Dingxian Shi Tai said on that day," Peachtree Flower Fairy replied.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "When Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingjing Shi Tai, and Dingyi Shi Tai were chit chatting inside

the convent, they talked about the merger of the five mountains sword schools. Dingyi Shi Tai said: 'It's alright if the five mountains sword schools don't merge. But if we're going to merge, then we must ask Songshan School's Mr. Zuo Lengchan to become the headmaster.' Do you believe me?" Zuo Lengchan was secretly feeling very happy. He replied, "Dingyi Shi Tai gave me a lot face, I don't deserve it."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Don't be happy yet. Dingyi Shi Tai also said: 'Among the heroes in the realm, Songshan School's headmaster Zuo is very highly regarded. If he does become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, that's really the best choice. But he's very selfish, narrow minded, and has no tolerance. If he really becomes the headmaster, then my female disciples would certainly suffer under him.'"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy continued his brother's speech, "Dingxian Shi Tai then said: 'On the other hand, we have six heroes here. Their martial arts are really high, and their knowledge is also vast. They would do well enough as headmaster of the Five Mountains School.'"

Zuo Lengchan laughed coldly and said, "Six heroes? Who are they?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy replied, "Of course these six heroes are the six of us." As soon as he said this, the thousands of people on the mountaintop burst into laughter. Even though most of these people didn't know of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, they saw that these six brothers looked weird and that their appearances were comical. When they heard that they were praising themselves as heroes and were saying that their 'martial arts are high and their knowledge is vast', they couldn't hold back their laughter.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "At that time, when Dingxian Shi Tai mentioned these words 'Six Heroes', Dingjing and Dingyi Shi Tai immediately realised that these words were referring to the six of us, and they immediately cheered. Hmmm, what did Dingyi Shi Tai say at that time? Brothers, do you remember?"



Peachtree Fruit Fairy confidently replied, "Of course I remember. At that time, Dingyi Shi Tai said: 'The knowledge of these Peach Valley Six Fairies, when actually compared to Shaolin Temple's Great Master Fangzheng, lack only by a bit. Compared to Priest Chongxu of Wudang School, their martial arts aren't as good. But within the five mountains sword schools, no one can be compared to them. Martial sisters, what do you think?' Dingjing Shi Tai then said: 'I actually think otherwise. Martial Sister Dingxian's martial art and knowledge aren't below the Peach Valley Six Fairies at all. It's a pity that we're females and we're also Buddhists. So it'll be inconvenient for us to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School and lead the thousands of heroes. So, we should choose the Peach Valley Six Fairies for this position.'"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy continued with the story, "Dingxian Shi Tai nodded her head and then she said: 'If the five mountains sword schools are really going to merge, and these six brothers aren't the headmasters, then it would be hard for the school to flourish and prosper.'" As Linghu Chong listened on, he found it becoming funnier and funnier as he came to understand that the Peach Valley Six Fairies were deliberately trying to cause trouble for Zuo Lengchan. Zuo Lengchan had fabricated words and tried to pass them off as words said by people who had already passed away, and now the Peach Valley Six Fairies were copying him. This tactic of making use of Zuo Lengchan's method to dispute with him was really good as Zuo Lengchan was unable to dispute back.

On top of Mount Songshan, besides people from Songshan School and some outsiders who are under Zuo Lengchan's command, there were actually many people who disagreed strongly with the idea of merging the five mountains sword schools. Some were highly experienced heroes such as Abbot Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu who were afraid that Zuo Lengchan's ambition would become unchecked and disaster would strike in Jianghu. There were

also those who saw Priest Tianmen died miserably and were feeling very angry at Zuo Lengchan. There were some who believed that after the five mountains schools had merged, the reputation of the Five Mountains School would prosper greatly, and that they wouldn't allow their own school to miss out on this; And there was also Linghu Chong and his Heng-Shan School's people who had great hostility towards Zuo Lengchan believing that Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingjing Shi Tai, and Dingyi Shi Tai were killed by him, and were hoping to exact their revenge on him. When all these people heard the nonsense that the Peach Valley Six Fairies were spouting, some people also fabricated similar things making Zuo Lengchan unable to dispute them back. But for the most part, people were just laughing quietly, while the young ones laughed slightly louder. Suddenly, a rough voice said, "Peach Valley Six Weirdos, were there other witnesses around when Dingxian Shi Tai said this?"

Peachtree Root Fairy replied, "Many Heng-Shan School disciples heard it themselves. Miss Zheng, isn't that right?"

Zheng E quickly held back her laughter and calmly replied, "That's right. Headmaster Zuo, you said that my master approved of the merger of the five schools. Who else heard this? Martial sisters, did any of you hear these words from our honourable master?"

More than a hundred female disciples answered together, "We've never heard of these words." One of the disciples said loudly, "Most likely, those words were Headmaster Zuo's own fabrication." There was also a female disciple who said, "Compared to Headmaster Zuo, my master was more inclined to support the Peach Valley Six Fairies. We've all been following the three honourables for many years now, how could we not have known what was in their minds?"

Many people burst into laughter. Peachtree Branch Fairy loudly added, "That's right, we're not telling lies, isn't that right? Later on, Dingxian Shi Tai also said: 'When the five schools do merge then there's only one position of

headmaster, while the Peach Valley Six Fairies have six people. Who do you think will be the best one to take on this position?'. Brothers, what was Dingjing Shi Tai's answer?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy replied, "This... Hmm, yes, Dingjing Shi Tai said: 'Even when the five schools merge into one, the mountains of Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, Hengshan, Songshan are on the east, south, west, north, and in the middle respectively, and they can't be physically merged into one. Zuo Lengchan is also not an emperor. How could he move all these mountains together and make it one? So we'll just ask five of the Peach Valley Six Fairies to take care of each of the mountains, and have the remaining one to be the headmaster.'"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "That's right! Dingyi Shi Tai then said: 'Martial sister is right. The parents of the Peach Valley Six Fairies had really good foresight, they knew that Zuo Lengchan wanted to merge the five mountains sword schools sometime in the future so they gave birth to six brothers, not five or seven. Really admirable, admirable!'" When the crowd heard this, their laughter was so loud that it reverberated through the whole mountain.

Zuo Lengchan had prepared this place of worship for the merger of the five mountains school. He had originally set the place up in all its grandeur so that all the attending heroes would be awed by it. But he had never expected that these six idiots would come out and start telling jokes in front of everyone, making this grand ceremony looking like a comical play. Zuo Lengchan was actually furious, but since he was the host at Mount Songshan, he couldn't just do whatever he wished and was forced to hold his anger in check. He secretly hatched a plan, "Once this matter is finished, if I don't kill these six idiots, then I'm not Zuo."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy suddenly wept loudly and started calling out, "This is not good... not good! Ever since the six of us were born, we've never been more than a foot apart from each other. One is to be the headmaster of the Five

Mountains School, while the others are going to live separately on five other mountains. This won't do, we can't do that." He was crying genuinely, as if the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School had been decided, and that the six of them were faced with the situation of parting ways forever.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Sixth brother, don't be upset, the six of us won't be separated. Brothers, don't give up. I also won't give up. But since people expect us to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, we're left with no choice but to go against the merger of the five mountains schools."

Peachtree Root Fairy and the other four brothers replied together, "Right, right, why do we need to merge the five mountains sword schools?"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy snorted his nose and broke into a smile. He said, "Even if the schools are really merging, there's a great hero in the Five Mountains School. Compared to the six of us, his knowledge is higher, his martial art is more powerful, and just like the six of us, he has the favour of everyone. It's not late for this kind of person to become the headmaster."

Zuo Lengchan was worried that these six chaps would continue with their pestering and make more and more trouble. So he quickly cut them off and immediately said clearly, "Six heroes, are you the headmaster of Heng-Shan School? Or is it someone else? Are the six heroes taking responsibility for Heng-Shan School's matters?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy replied, "We originally wanted to become the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. But thinking that the headmaster of Songshan School is you, old brother Zuo, when the six of us become the headmaster of Heng-Shan, then we would be on par with you. Hey, hey, this... that..."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "If we're on par with him, then the six of us heroes would definitely lose our position.

That's why we asked Linghu Chong to take on this difficult job and become the headmaster of Heng-Shan School." Zuo Lengchan was seething with rage, and he said coldly, "Headmaster Linghu, you're now leading the Heng-Shan School family, but you're not restricting the people in your noble school but allowed them to spout nonsense in front of the entire realm's heroes and shame themselves."

Linghu Chong smiled. "These six Peachtree brothers are honest and sincere, and they speak candidly. But they're not the kind of people who blindly invent rumours. Their story of Dingxian Shi Tai is more reliable when compared to the nonsense from someone outside this school."

Zuo Lengchan snorted and said, "Today, on this matter of the five mountains sword schools merger, your noble school is thinking of objecting to it all by yourself?"

Linghu Chong shook his head. "Heng-Shan School is not objecting to it by ourselves. Huashan School's headmaster, Mr. Yue, is the respected master who initially taught me my skills. Today, even though I belong to another school, I don't dare to forget the instructions from my former respected master."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "The way you said that, you'll still listen to what Huashan School's Mr. Yue say?"

"That's right. My Heng-Shan School and Huashan School are uniting our effort and working together," Linghu Chong replied.

Zuo Lengchan turned his head to look at the Huashan School. He then said, "Mr. Yue, Headmaster Linghu didn't forget your past kindness to him. Congratulations! Headmaster Linghu will follow your lead whether Sir agrees to the merger or not. But what does Sir think of this merger?"

Yue Buqun replied, "Since Chief Zuo asked me earlier, I've already considered about this matter in details. But it's actually not easy to reach a decision." At that moment, everyone in the crowd turned their eyes to look at him. Many of the people in the crowd thought, "Hengshan School is

weak to stand by itself, and Taishan School has divisions inside their school, so both of them were unable to resist Songshan School. At this time, Huashan School and Hengshan School have become allies, and adding Hengshan School to the mix, they can definitely go up against Songshan School." They then heard Yue Buqun continued, "My Huashan School was founded more than two hundred years ago. Some time ago, our school suffered a schism and divided into the Qi Branch and the Sword Branch. All the seniors in Wulin already know about this. When I thought of the days when the two branches were killing each other, I still tremble with fear..."

Linghu Chong pondered, "Master once mentioned that the struggle between these two branches was the school's biggest shame and cannot be mentioned to the people outside of the school. Why is he now publicly discussing about this matter in front of all the realm's heroes?" He then heard Yue Buqun's sharp voice travelling over many li, and each word that he said echoed back from distant places. Linghu Chong thought, "Master's cultivation of the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' has gotten even higher. His voice and the way he used his inner energy seems quite different than the past."

Yue Buqun continued, "That's why I deeply feel that being apart is not as good as being together for all the sects in Wulin. Hundreds of years ago, the fightings were very fierce in Jianghu, and no one knows just how many people from the orthodox path died from such fights. Tracing the source of this, it's most likely that these fighting occur because there were too many sects in Jianghu. I've always believed that if all the sects in Wulin are to become one, then everyone will be like brothers, and all those kinds of killings would be greatly reduced. Then many heroes would not lose their lives while they're still in their prime, and the numbers of orphans and widows would also be greatly reduced." He said this with a voice full of pity towards the fate of mankind,

and many people couldn't help but nod their heads when they heard this. There were some people who whispered, "Huashan's Yue Buqun is called 'Gentleman Sword'. He's really earned his reputation. His heart is full of compassion." Abbot Fangzheng joined his two palms and said, "Very good, very good! Scholar Yue is very compassionate. If everyone in Wulin thought the same way as Scholar Yue, then all the bloodshed and killings in Wulin will disappear completely."

Yue Buqun said, "Great Master is overpraising me. That was just my shallow view of things. Shaolin temple's reverend monks from generations past must've thought of the same thing a long time ago. It's evidence of Shaolin temple's prestigious status in Wulin that with just one call, all the wise and outstanding warriors from every school and sect responds to it. This must be because of Shaolin temple's achievements for the last hundreds of years. It's true that each school and each sect's martial art has different roots and that their methods of inner energy cultivation are very different from each other. So if we actually want every pugilist out there to be under one school, then that would be easier said than done. 'A gentleman is friendly but not at the expense of principle.' Just so, our martial arts can be different but we must still be at peace with one another. Even until today, there are still a lot of sects and schools in Jianghu, which are clearly fighting in the open or are fighting in secret, and countless lives are lost because of this. All these deaths and killings, just because of some senseless fights. All the wise heroes from years past must've known that all these divisions in sects and schools are causing a lot of harm in Jianghu. But why can't we resolve all these heartaches and eliminate this division? I really don't understand this. So I've been thinking about this matter for many years now, and it was only recently that I've suddenly become enlightened and understood the key point that's been hindering this from happening. This matter affects the life and death of everyone in Wulin from the orthodox path, so I don't dare to keep this

matter to myself. That's why I've cautiously raised the issue and ask everyone here to give me some advice."

The crowd one by one shouted, "Please say it, please say it!" "Mr. Yue's opinion is definitely wise." "So what's the reason behind this?" "Eliminating all the division between sects and schools is impossible!" Yue Buqun waited until the crowd calmed down before saying, "I thought about this and felt that one of the reasons is the difference between the word 'hurried' and 'gradual'. Throughout the times, the compassionate people in Wulin have always hoped to remove the division between the sects and they have often done this in a hurry. They've always tried to remove these boundaries between sects and eliminate the division in one fell swoop, but they never realised how difficult it is to do. All the sects in Wulin, the big ones number in the tens and the small ones number in the thousands, and every single sect has its tradition in the tens or even thousands of years of history. If they actually want to eliminate all these divisions in one fell swoop, then of course it's going to be impossible."

Zuo Lengchan said, "So according to Mr. Yue's opinion, if we want to eliminate the division between sects then it can never be done? Wouldn't that be crushing everyone's hope?"

Yue Buqun shook his head. "Even though it's very difficult to do, it's actually still possible to do. I said before about the difference: hurried and gradual. As the saying goes, you botch it by rushing it. We must change our principle and the people from the orthodox path must also cooperate to go forward. If we do it in fifty years, or one hundred years, we'll definitely succeed."

Zuo Lengchan sighed before saying, "Fifty years, one hundred years, most of the heroes here would've turned into bones by then."

Yue Buqun replied, "We must do our best on this matter, and we don't have to worry whether we'll be able to actually complete this matter in our own generation or not. This is the same like planting trees for the later generations. We plant



the trees and let the future generations enjoy some peace and calm. How can this be not a good idea? Also, fifty or one hundred years is the time that it would take to completely accomplish this. But if you actually want to see some slight accomplishment, then eight to ten years will be sufficient to see what have been achieved."

Zuo Lengchan said, "Eight to ten years to see a slight improvement... That's very good then. But how do we first start on this?"

Yue Buqun smiled slightly and continued, "Actually what Chief Zuo is doing right now is to the benefit of the orthodox path in Jianghu. We should first eliminate this view of many sects and schools in Wulin as it achieves nothing. First, we should get the sects and schools which are relatively near to each other, have similar martial arts, and are friendly to each other to first combine as much as they can. Then within eight to ten years, the number of sects and schools would've been greatly reduced. Our five mountains sword schools should first combine to make the Five Mountains School to setup an example for the other sects. This would be a glorious achievement that would be praised throughout Jianghu for years to come."

When he finished saying this, the crowd started to call out, "So Huashan School approves of the merger."

Linghu Chong was greatly startled, and he thought, "I never expected that Master would actually approve of the merger. Since I've already said that Heng-Shan School will follow Huashan School's lead, then I can't eat my words and not go forward with the merger." He was feeling anxious and took a look towards Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. They both were shaking their heads and were looking quite depressed.

Zuo Lengchan had always been worried that Yue Buqun would object. This person was good at debating. His reputation in Jianghu was also very good, and it was hard to force him into doing something. He had never expected that

Yue Buqun would unexpectedly support the merger. He was elated as he said, "Songshan School approves of the merger. My reason for the merger before was originally 'Unity of will is an impregnable stronghold.' Together we're strong and alone we're weak. But after hearing Mr. Yue's reason, my view has now been broadened and I realised that this merger concerns the future of Wulin and will benefit more than just our five schools."

Yue Buqun replied, "After our five schools merged, if we want to actually extend our influence then we'll definitely be in competition with the heroes from the other sects. When this happens, not only would it result in problems throughout Wulin, it would also be very unbeneficial to our Five Mountains School. Thus, the merger would also be more disadvantageous than beneficial to all the heroes in Wulin. That's why the objective of this merger must be 'to stop the fighting and to resolve the disputes'. That way, after the merger of our five schools, no sect would be disadvantaged and everyone need not have any worries."

When the crowd heard him, there were some who breathed a sigh of relief, and there were also some who were still half doubting what he said. Zuo Lengchan said, "In that case, Huashan School approves of the merger?"

"That's right," Yue Buqun answered. He paused for a while before looking at Linghu Chong. "Heng-Shan School's Headmaster Linghu was previously in the Huashan School, so he and I have more than twenty years of master-disciple relationship. After he went out of the Huashan School, I didn't abandon him and have never forgotten our relationship. I've always hoped that we can be together again under one school. Today, I've already promised him that we will again be in the same school." He said till here when he revealed his smile. Linghu Chong was shaken and he immediately understood. Linghu Chong thought, "He promised me that I'll be able to return to his school, but he didn't actually mean to return to Huashan. He actually meant that after the five

schools have merged, then Master, Master-Wife, and I would again be under one school. That's also very good." His thought continued, "Master just said how the merger of the five schools must be with the aim 'to stop the fightings and to resolve the disputes'. If that's true, then the merger of the five schools is a good thing and not a bad thing at all. Looking ahead, it seems that the future of the Five Mountains School is still undecided whether its aim is going to be what Master has said or what Zuo Lengchan has envisioned. If Huashan and Heng-Shan School ally together, and if we add Hengshan School as well as some of the priests from Taishan School to our alliance, then our three and a half schools would be able to withstand Songshan School and half of the Taishan School. Only then would we be able to win."

Linghu Chong still had this disquieting thought inside his heart when he heard Zuo Lengchan said, "Congratulations Mr. Yue and Headmaster Linghu! From today onwards, both of you are again under one school. This is a really happy event." From among the crowd, hundreds of them started to applaud this.

Suddenly, Peachtree Branch Fairy loudly said, "This is inappropriate, really inappropriate, really really inappropriate!"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy asked, "Why is it inappropriate?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy answered, "The headmaster position of the Heng-Shan School should've belonged to us brothers, isn't that right?"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy and the other four brothers answered together, "Yes!"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "But we were polite, so we let Linghu Chong do it, isn't that right? But when we gave Linghu Chong this position, there was a clause for him to take revenge for Dingxian, Dingjing, and Dingyi Shi Tai, isn't this right?"

When he asked this, his other five brothers replied together, "Yes!"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "But what if the people who killed the three Shi Tai were inside the five mountains sword schools? According to my opinion, if it's not that person surnamed Zuo (left), then it's that person surnamed You (right), or maybe if it's not left or right, then it's that person surnamed Zhong (middle). If Linghu Chong joined the Five Mountains School, then he would become martial brother with this person surnamed Zuo or You or Zhong. Then how is he going to take revenge for Dingxian Shi Tai?"

The other Peach Valley Five Fairies answered, "What you said isn't wrong at all."

Zuo Lengchan was furious and he thought, "You six chaps have insulted me. Now, you'll only live for a few more hours. After that none of you would be able to spout your nonsense anymore!" He then heard Peachtree Root Fairy said, "If Linghu Chong isn't going to take revenge for Dingxian Shi Tai, then he can't be the headmaster of Heng-Shan School anymore, isn't this right? If he's not the headmaster of Heng-Shan School then he can't make the decision for Heng-Shan School, isn't this right? If he can't make the decision for Heng-Shan School, then whether Heng-Shan School joins the Five Mountains School or not isn't Linghu Chong's decision to make, isn't this right?"

As he asked each question, the other Peach Valley Five Fairies answered each question with a resounding, "Yes!"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "A school cannot be without a headmaster. Since Linghu Chong can't be the headmaster of the Heng-Shan School anymore, we must select a wise person to do it, isn't this right? In Heng-Shan School, there are six heroes whose martial arts are powerful with vast knowledge. At that time, Dingxian Shi Tai has already decided, and just then Five Mountains School's Chief Zuo has also said: 'The six of you have powerful martial art and vast knowledge. I've heard of your illustrious names for a long time already', isn't this right?"

As Peachtree Trunk Fairy asked each question, his five brothers again answered each question together with a, "Yes!" The person asking the question was getting louder and louder, while the people answering him were also getting stronger and stronger.

The crowd on the mountaintop found this to be really funny and they were also feeling happy that there were people here causing trouble for the Songshan School. Some people were laughing loudly at this, while tens of them were following the Peach Valley Five Fairies in answering, "Yes!"

After Yue Buqun approved of the merger, Linghu Chong's mind was in chaos. When he heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies spouting nonsense, he really liked it as it seemed that the six brothers were trying to get him out of trouble. But after hearing them for some time, he suddenly found it strange. He thought, "Peach Valley Six Fairies usually speak in an entangled manner, and what they say usually doesn't connect. But ever since we've arrived at Songshan, every single sentence they've said always has some deep meaning behind them. Just a moment ago what they were saying seemed to be for their own benefits, but those words they said actually had some hidden meaning behind them. And it's actually very hard to dispute what they were saying. It's really different from their usual way of randomly spouting nonsense. Could it be that there's a wise person who's directing them?"

He then heard Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "These six people in Heng-Shan School have outstanding martial arts and their knowledge and experience are just like those of grand heroes. Everyone's here not a fool, so you must know who these people are, isn't this right?" More than a hundred people laughingly answered, "Yes!"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "The world's right and wrong depends on people's opinion, and this depends on the people's heart. May I ask everyone, who are these six grand heroes?" More than two hundred people laughed loudly while

they answered, "Of course these six heroes are the Peach Valley Six Fairies."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Ah, in that case, this headmaster position of Heng-Shan School; the six of us are forced to take responsibility for it, pushed into taking on this difficult job, of noble character and high prestige, is in favour with the public, successful, comes to light, drum the mountain, opens the door..." As he talked, the sentence was getting more and more unintelligible, and the crowd was clutching their stomachs laughing loudly. Songshan School's people were now shouting loudly, "What are you six chaps rambling about? Quickly scam down this mountain!"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Strange! Your Songshan School was trying everything you can to merge the five schools together. But now you unexpectedly want the six big heroes of Heng-Shan School to go down the mountain. Once the six of us are gone, then the rest of Heng-Shan School's little heroes and female heroes will of course follow us down the mountain, and this merger of the five mountains school would fail. Great! Heng-Shan School, let's go down the mountain and let their four schools merge together. Zuo Lengchan loves to become the headmaster of the four schools, we'll just let him do it. We, Heng-Shan School, won't join this celebration."

Yihe, Yiqing, and the rest of the female disciples hated Zuo Lengchan deeply. When they heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies said this, they immediately shouted, "Let's go!"

When Zuo Lengchan heard this, he was worried. He said to Linghu Chong, "Headmaster Linghu, we're martial artists, and our words are like gold. You already said that you'll follow Mr. Yue's lead in this. So should we disregard what you said?"

Linghu Chong lifted his head and took a look at Yue Buqun. Yue Buqun's face was looking intense, and he was continuously nodding his head; Linghu Chong turned his head and looked at Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. He saw they were continuously shaking their heads

seeing that he had not done what he was supposed to do. Suddenly, he heard Yue Buqun said, "Chong'er, you and I are like father and son, and your Master-Wife is waiting for you. Could it be that you don't want to be together with us? To be like we were before?"

When Linghu Chong heard this, tears suddenly filled his eyes. Without thinking anymore, he loudly said, "Master, Master-Wife, Son actually hopes for this. Since you support the merger of the five schools, then Son doesn't dare to disobey you." He paused for a time, before continuing, "But, the deep enmity of the three Shi Tai..."

Yue Buqun loudly said, "Heng-Shan School's Dingxian, Dingjing, and Dingyi Shi Tai are the unfortunate victims of a plot, and everyone from the orthodox path regrets this deeply. From today onwards, after the merger of the five schools, Heng-Shan School's matter is also my business. Right now, the most important thing to do is to investigate this matter clearly. Then with the might of our five schools, and with the assistance of everyone from the orthodox path, we'll make minced meat out of this murderer. Chong'er, you don't need to be anxious. This murderer is our Five Mountains School's most hated enemy and we would never let him go." The way he said all this was full of righteousness and without any doubt. Heng-Shan School's female disciples cheered loudly. Yihe loudly called out, "Mr. Yue is right. If your honourable is able to preside over this and avenge our three honourable then everyone from Heng-Shan will be deeply grateful to you."

Yue Buqun said, "I'll take responsibility for this matter. Within three years, if I can't avenge the three Shi Tai, then everyone from the orthodox path can say that I'm a shameless and despicable lowlife." After he said this, Heng-Shan School's female disciples cheered loudly. Linghu Chong thought, "Even though I'm determined to avenge the three Shi Tai, I still wouldn't be able to put a time limit to my effort. Everyone suspects that Zuo Lengchan is the murderer, but

how do we get proof for it? Even if we pressed him for an answer, he would never admit it. How can Master be so certain? He must've known who the murderer is and he must also have the evidence to back this up to be able to do this within three years."

He had previously agreed to accompany Yue Buqun in approving of the merger, but he was afraid that Heng-Shan School's disciples would not be willing to go with this decision. But when he saw them cheering loudly, and not a single one of them raised their objection, he felt relieved. In a loud voice, he said, "That's fabulous. My master, Mr. Yue, has already said that the most important thing is to investigate clearly who has killed the three Shi Tai, and that this person is the most hated enemy of the Five Mountains School and would never be let go. Headmaster Zuo, you approve of this?"

Zuo Lengchan coldly said, "These words are right. Why would I disapprove of it?"

"All the heroes here today have already heard. The most important thing is to investigate clearly who killed the three Shi Tai. No matter if he's the killer, or if he's the person pulling the string, or even if he's a highly respected senior, every single person must be executed," Linghu Chong announced. When the crowd heard this, half of them cheered.

Zuo Lengchan waited for them to quieten down before he said, "East mountain Taishan, south mountain Hengshan, west mountain Huashan, north mountain Heng-Shan, and middle mountain Songshan have unanimously approved of the merger. From now on, the names of our five mountains sword schools will no longer be mentioned in Wulin, and all of the five schools' disciples are now the new disciples of the Five Mountains School." He waved his left hand, and firecrackers started to go off from everywhere around the mountaintop celebrating the formal opening of the 'Five Mountains School'. The crowd was smiling and was amusedly



looking around at each other. They all thought, "Zuo Lengchan has prepared everything so carefully for the merger of the five mountains sword schools. If the merger has actually failed today, it seems likely this Songshan mountaintop may have turned into a killing field and be flooded with blood."

The mountaintop was overflowing with smoke. Paper fillings were flying everywhere, the sound of the firecrackers was getting louder and louder, and no one was able to say anything. After a very long time, the firecrackers finally stopped. This was followed by a number of people going up to Zuo Lengchan to congratulate him. It seemed that these people were the ones invited by Songshan School to assist them, or maybe they were the people who wanted to flatter Zuo Lengchan after seeing him succeed. Zuo Lengchan was humble in receiving their congratulations, and even his cold ice face revealed a smile or two.

Suddenly, Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Since the five mountains sword schools have already merged into Five Mountains School, then we'll allow nature to take its course. This is called knowing when to let things be."

Zuo Lengchan thought, "Ever since you six weirdoes have been on this mountaintop, these were the first words you said that resemble what normal people say."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Each of the schools has its own headmaster. Who do you think is the best to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster? If everyone unanimously elects the Peach Valley Six Fairies, then we'll be forced to take on the responsibility."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Just then Mr. Yue said: The merger of the five schools is to the benefit of Wulin and not for personal ambition. Since it's like that, even though this position has a big responsibility, and requires a lot of work, the six of us will take on this difficult job."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy let out a long sigh, then he said, "Since everyone is so enthusiastic, how can we six brothers

just sit on the side and be spectators, and not lend our strengths to the orthodox path in Jianghu?"

These six brothers were talking as if they had been elected to lead the Five Mountains School. A tall old man from Songshan School said loudly, "Who elected you to be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School? That's just crazy talk!" This person was Zuo Lengchan's martial brother, 'Tower Holding Palm' Ding Mian. At this time, people from Songshan School started to make some noise. One person said, "If today isn't a great celebration for the five schools' merger, we would've chopped all your legs off." Ding Mian added, "Headmaster Linghu, you don't care that these six crazy people are making a disturbance here?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy loudly said, "You're calling Linghu Chong 'Headmaster Linghu'! You're electing him as the Five Mountains School's headmaster? Just then Zuo Lengchan said that there's no more Heng-Shan School or Huashan School in Wulin. Since you called him Headmaster Linghu, that means you recognise him as the headmaster of the Five Mountains School."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "When compared to us, Linghu Chong isn't as good as us. But since you want Linghu Chong to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster, then you'll have to settle for second best then, and we just have to put up with it."

Peachtree Root Fairy raised his voice and called out, "Songshan School nominates Linghu Chong to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster! What does everyone think of this?"

This was followed by the tender-voiced cheers of more than a hundred females. Of course they were all the female disciples of the Heng-Shan School. Ding Mian was the one who called out 'Headmaster Linghu' and gave the Peach Valley Six Fairies this topic. He couldn't help feeling embarrassed and his face was blushing furiously, not knowing what to say. He just managed to stutter, "No, no! I...

I didn't.... didn't mean it that way. I'm not nominating Linghu Chong to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster..."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy cut him off. "You're saying you don't want Linghu Chong to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster because you don't want to lose the Peach Valley Six Fairies. Since you love us so much, it would be impolite for us six brothers to refuse. We have to shamefully take on this position then."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "How about this? There's no harm for us to take on the position for one and a half year while we wait for things to settle. Then we'll step down and give this position to a better person. There's no harm in doing that." His five brothers answered together, "Right, right, this is called taking the middle road."

Zuo Lengchan coldly said, "The six of you really talk a lot here as if all the world's heroes here are nothing. Why can't you allow other people to say a few words?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy replied, "We can, we can, why not? If you want to talk, please talk. If you want to fart, then please fart." When he said these words 'If you want to fart, then please fart', everyone around the place of worship suddenly became quiet because if anyone said anything, they could be considered farting.

After some time, Zuo Lengchan again said, "Heroes, please tell us your opinions. Ignore the nonsense those six crazy people were spouting."

Peach Valley Six Fairies took a breath together and snorted a few times. Then they said, "Someone's farting, it smells really bad."

A thin old man from the Songshan School group said loudly, "Five mountains sword schools have the same root, different branches. We've been allied together and for the last few years, Headmaster Zuo has been our chief. Headmaster Zuo has been leading the five schools for a long time now, and has increased the prestige of the five schools. So naturally, Chief Zuo is our Five Mountains School's

headmaster. Who else can take on this position?" This person participated in Liu Zhengfeng's gold basin hand-washing ceremony in Hengshan, so many people recognised him as Lu Bai. Ding Mian, Lu Bai, and Fei Bin killed Liu Zhengfeng's whole family. They were really cruel and merciless.

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Wrong, wrong! We must elect a new headmaster for the Five Mountains School. This position of headmaster, we must get rid of the old and exchange it with a new one."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "That's right. If Zuo Lengchan becomes the headmaster again, then that's like changing the form but not the content and there wouldn't be an atmosphere of new-ness. Why would you merge the five schools then?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Everyone can become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, but Zuo Lengchan cannot."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "According to my esteemed opinion, we should get everyone to take turns doing the job. A person can be a headmaster for a day. So I'll do it today, then you'll do it tomorrow. Everyone will share it and gets their turn. This is a really fair method and no one can take advantage of it. This is really good business, and everyone's happy."

Peachtree Root Fairy applauded and he said, "This method is really clever, so we should get the youngest young lady to do it first. I elect Heng-Shan School's little sister Qin Juan to be today's headmaster of the Five Mountains School."

Heng-Shan School's female disciples knew that the Peach Valley Six Fairies' statement was to make trouble for Zuo Lengchan, so they all cheered. For more than a thousand people there, this matter had nothing to do with them, so they also followed in cheering. In a moment, the Songshan mountaintop was again in chaos.

# **Chapter 33: Sword Fight**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**



**"Ring," the two sword tips hit each other in mid-air. Sparks flew in all direction, and the two swords both bent into arches. The two both pushed out with their left hands, and then jumped back when the two hands met.**

An old priest from the Taishan School said loudly, "This position of headmaster of the Five Mountains School must be held by a senior with virtue, ability, and prestige. How can it be otherwise?" This person's voice was loud, and even those people who were in the middle of the bustling noise managed to hear it clearly.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Ability, integrity, and prestige? In all of Wulin, the only person who fulfills all these requirements is Shaolin's Great Master Fangzheng." Every time the Peach Valley Six Fairies talked, everyone had laughed because no one could actually understand what they were talking about. But when they mentioned Great Master Fangzheng's name, the whole mountaintop became quiet. Great Master Fangzheng's martial art was powerful, and he was also a merciful and righteous person. He had always upheld justice in Wulin, and had also been revered by everyone for the last dozen of years. Shaolin School's reputation was flourishing, and it was also the number one school in Wulin. So when the descriptions of 'ability, integrity, and prestige' were used to describe Great Master Fangzheng, no one objected.

Peachtree Root Fairy shouted, "Is Shaolin temple's Abbot Fangzheng a person of ability, integrity, and prestige?"

The thousands of people there answered together, "He is!"

"Very good, since everyone agreed, Great Master Fangzheng is favoured by everyone then. Compared to the six of us, it seems Great Master Fangzheng is favoured slightly more. In that case, we'll have to invite Great Master Fangzheng to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster then."

Quite a few people from Songshan School and Taishan School immediately called out, "Nonsense! Great Master Fangzheng is the headmaster of Shaolin School. What does he have to do with our Five Mountains School?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy replied, "Just now, this old priest said he wanted to invite a senior of integrity, ability, and prestige to become the headmaster, so I found one for him. Could it be Great Master Fangzheng isn't a person of ability and integrity? Could it be he has no prestige? Alas, could it be that he's not a senior in Wulin? Are you saying Great Master isn't a senior of integrity, ability, and prestige, and that he's just a lowly nobody in Wulin? What absurdity! Who had the nerve to say that? Who didn't want him to become the headmaster? Peach Valley Six Fairies will have it out with him!"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Great Master Fangzheng has been the headmaster of Shaolin School for dozens of years already. Why can't he be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School? Could it be the Five Mountains School is above Shaolin School as of today? Which crazy person has the nerve to say Great Master Fangzheng isn't fit to be the headmaster?"

Taishan School's Yujizi scowled. "Great Master Fangzheng is a person of integrity and ability, and everyone respects him deeply. But today we're electing the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. Great Master Fangzheng is a respected guest, how can we just drag him into our matter?"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "According to what you said, Great Master Fangzheng cannot be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School because Shaolin School and Five Mountains Schools are unrelated."

"Correct," Yujizi answered.

"How come Shaolin School and Five Mountains School are unrelated? I say they're greatly related! Which five schools formed the Five Mountains School?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy inquired.



"Sir, you already know, but you're still asking about it again. Five Mountains School consists of Songshan, Taishan, Huashan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan Schools," Yujizi replied.

Peachtree Flower Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy replied together, "Wrong, wrong! Just then Zuo Lengchan said that after the five mountains sword schools merged, Songshan School and Taishan School's names will no longer exist in Wulin. How come you mentioned the name of the five schools again?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "I see he's still very much attached to his school and doesn't want to forget it. Once an opportunity arises, he'll hatch a plan and destroy the Five Mountains School. Then he'll start rebuilding his Taishan School and establish its prestige again." Many people in the crowd started laughing as they thought, "These Peach Valley Six Fairies are crazily turning everything upside down. But every time someone says something slightly wrong, they immediately latched onto it and the original speakers can't do anything."

What all these people didn't know was that the Peach Valley Six Fairies had been debating endlessly since they managed to talk at around the age of two or three, and were particularly good at latching onto the mistakes in each other's speech. In the last dozens of years, they had become accustomed to doing this. Thus, it was no wonder that no one could be their match when the Peach Valley Six Fairies combined their six brains and mouths. Yujizi's face was green for a time, and red for a time. He said, "This is really one big bad luck for Five Mountains School with the six of you weirdos in it."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "You said the Five Mountains School is bad luck. That's really looking down at the Five Mountains School, and means that you don't want to stay inside the Five Mountains School."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "This is only the first day that our Five Mountains School is opened, and yet you're already

cursing it, saying that it's bad luck. In the future, the Five Mountains School will be glorious, and will stand as equals with Shaolin and Wudang. It will become a big school that everyone in Jianghu looks up to. Priest Yuji, how come you don't have a good heart and said something so ominous?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "I see Priest Yuji's body is at Five Mountains, but his heart is at Taishan, he's hoping the merger would fail and that it would break up by the end of the first day. With this kind of intention, how can the Five Mountains School accept him into the school?"

For the pugilists of Jianghu, they had always lived on the points of bloodied swords so they believed very much of things that were taboo. When everyone heard what the Peach Valley Six Fairies said, they all felt that the Peach Valley Six Fairies' words were logical. How could Yujizi said the Five Mountains School was bad luck on this auspicious day? Even Zuo Lengchan was dissatisfied at what Yujizi said. Yujizi knew he had said the wrong thing and he immediately stayed silent, while inwardly feeling angry.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "I said Shaolin School and Songshan School are related, but Priest Yuji said they're unrelated. So are they related or not? Are you right or am I right?"

Priest Yuji indignantly said, "Since you love to say that they're related, we'll just say that they're related."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Ha! Matters of the world are based on logic. Which mountain is Shaolin temple on? Which mountain is Songshan School on?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy answered, "Shaolin School is on Mount Shaoshi, Songshan School is on Mount Taishi. Shaoshi and Taishi both belong to Mount Songshan, is that right? Why did you say Shaolin School and Songshan School are unrelated?"

These words they said really made sense and everyone in the crowd were nodding their heads.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Just then Mr. Yue said, after schools have merged together, the number of fighting in Jianghu would decrease. It's for this reason that he approved of the merger. He also said, the merging schools will be selected based on the similarity of their skills, the closeness of their locations, and their willingness to merge. Speaking of nearness, Shaolin and Songshan are near each other, they are even together on one mountain. If Shaolin School and Songshan School don't merge, then what Mr. Yue said was a little bit like breaking... breaking... breaking some... some sort of air."

The crowd knew that he managed to hold back from saying the word 'wind', but they giggled over it. They all felt it was rather unthinkable for Shaolin and Songshan to merge, but what Peachtree Branch Fairy said was also quite reasonable, and it followed what Yue Buqun said earlier. Linghu Chong was secretly impressed, "The Peach Valley Six Fairies are experts in latching onto someone's words, but I'd never expected them to say these kinds of words. I wonder who's helping them?"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Great Master Fangzheng is in favour with the public, and originally we all wanted to invite him to become our Five Mountains School's headmaster. But someone raised the issue that Great Master Fangzheng doesn't belong to the Five Mountains School. So Shaolin and Five Mountains School must merge and become 'Shaolin Five Mountains School.' That way Great Master Fangzheng can become the new school's headmaster."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "That's right! At the present time, there's no one who can compare to Great Master Fangzheng or more fit to become the headmaster."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "We, Peach Valley Six Fairies, accept Great Master Fangzheng. Could it be there are people who don't accept?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "If there's anyone who doesn't want to accept, then there's no harm to come out

and have a contest with us. Once you beat the Peach Valley Six Fairies, you might as well have a contest with Great Master Fangzheng. Once you beat Great Master Fangzheng, you might as well have a contest with all the great masters from the Da Mo Hall, Luohan Hall, Commandment Courtyard, and the Scripture Chamber. Once you beat all the great masters from the Da Mo Hall, Luohan Hall, Commandment Courtyard, and the Scripture Chamber, then you can have a contest with Priest Chongxu of Wudang..."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy interrupted, "Fifth brother, why do they have to have a contest with Wudang's Priest Chongxu?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy answered, "The two headmasters from Wudang School and Shaolin School are best friends who share weal and woe together. If someone beat Great Master Fangzheng, how could Priest Chongxu not come out?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "That's right! You're not wrong at all! Once they beat Priest Chongxu, then they'll fight the Peach Valley Six Fairies."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Yi! They already fought against us, why do they have to fight us again?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy replied, "Even if we lost the first time, how could the Peach Valley Six Fairies happily admit defeat? We'll naturally dispute this with those smelly bastards again."

The crowd was laughing madly listening to the six brothers talking back and forth. There were some who were disagreeing with them, and there were some who were calling out and following them. Yujizi was extremely mad and couldn't hold it back anymore. He flew forward with his sword in his hand and called out, "Peach Valley Six Weirdos, Yujizi doesn't accept and wants to fight with you."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "We're all from the Five Mountains School, how can we be killing each other?"

"You talk too much. The gods detest it and the ghosts loathe it! Once we get rid of the six of you from the Five

Mountains School, our eyes will see clearer and our ears will hear better," Yujizi replied.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Alright, you have a sword in hand and murder in your heart. Are you thinking of using your sword to chop chop chop chop chop chop our six heads?"

Yujizi snorted and ignored him, but his eyes were full of murderous intention. Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Today is the merger of our five schools. If on the first day, your Taishan School kill six masters from the Heng-Shan School, how can the Five Mountains School cooperate after today? How can we still work together?"

Yujizi thought that these words sounded logical. If he killed these six people today, then there would be endless fighting as there would certainly be someone from Heng-Shan School who would seek revenge for them. He immediately restrained his anger and said, "Since you already know that we should work together, then stop hindering this big matter with your nonsense, and stop talking." He took his long sword a foot out of the scabbard then slammed it back in.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "How about words that are beneficial to the Five Mountains School's future and people in the orthodox path?"

Yujizi coldly laughed. "Hng, none of you are saying anything like that!"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Doesn't the matter of who's going to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School concern our school's future and the destiny of Wulin's orthodox path? The six of us are doing our best to choose a senior master who's in favour with the public to become our headmaster here. But you're so selfish, and only want that person who gave you three thousand gold taels and four pretty ladies to become the headmaster."

Yujizi was livid as he shouted, "NONSENSE! Who said someone gave me three thousand gold taels and four pretty

ladies?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Hmmm... I said the number wrongly. It's not three thousand gold taels; it's definitely four thousand taels. It's not four pretty ladies, or three ladies, but it's five ladies. You don't know who gave these to you? It's that person who you wanted to elect as the headmaster. That's the person who gave these gifts to you.

Yujizi immediately drew his long sword. "You're talking nonsense again! I want your blood splattered right here!"

Peachtree Flower Fairy cackled madly, walked towards Yujizi, and said, "You used such a despicable method to harm Priest Tianmen who was your Taishan School's headmaster. Are you still thinking of harming other people? Not only was Priest Tianmen killed by you right here, other people from your own school were harmed by you. Harming people really must be your specialty. Why don't you see and try it on my body." As he said this, he strode forward step by step. Yujizi held his long sword in front of him and severely shouted, "Stop! Walk one more step and I won't be polite anymore."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Are you being polite right now? This Songshan mountaintop isn't yours. I'm allowed to walk anywhere I want, go to the east, walk to the west, what's that got to do with you?" As he said this, he again walked forward a few more steps and was now only a few feet away from Yujizi. Looking at Peachtree Flower Fairy's ugly, long horse-face with crooked yellow teeth, feeling of extreme loathing grew within Yujizi. With a stab, he thrust out his long sword towards Peachtree Flower Fairy's chest.

Peachtree Flower Fairy hurriedly dodged the stab and scolded, "Smelly traitor, you're really... really attacking!"

Yujizi had already grasped the essence of Taishan School's swordsmanship. As his first attack came out, his second attack followed and the sword moves were extremely fast. Peachtree Flower Fairy had already dodged four attacks in the time he took to scold Yujizi. But Yujizi's sword moves were getting faster and faster, while Peachtree Flower Fairy's

hands and legs were very busy dodging in a disorderly fashion. "Woah, woah!" Peachtree Flower Fairy continuously called out. He wanted to take the short iron stick hanging from his waist but he was too slow to do so. As the sword flashed around, Peachtree Flower Fairy's left shoulder was pierced. Immediately within seconds of this, Yujizi's long sword fell from his hand and his whole body flew up into the air. His four limbs were each grabbed by Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, and Peachtree Leaf Fairies. This was like a rabbit caught by a falcon, and happened very quickly.

Suddenly, there was a flash of yellow and a sword chopped down towards Peachtree Branch Fairy's head. Peachtree Fruit Fairy, already beside his brothers to protect them, extended his short iron stick to block the sword. The yellow-clad person sent his second sword thrust towards Peachtree Root Fairy's chest. Peachtree Flower Fairy drew out his short iron stick to block this attack and recognized the yellow-clad person as Songshan School's headmaster, Zuo Lengchan. Zuo Lengchan knew that even though the Peach Valley Six Fairies talked in a jumble, they actually had astonishing skills. On that year when he sent a master of Huashan School's sword branch, Cheng Buyou, to Mount Huashan, Cheng Buyou was torn into four pieces. When he saw Yujizi captured by these six brothers, he knew he must rescue Yujizi promptly to prevent him from being torn apart. Actually, since he was the host, it was inappropriate for him to just fight as he wanted. But the situation was desperate so he hastily pulled his sword out to help. Zuo Lengchan attacked both Peachtree Branch Fairy and Peachtree Root Fairy to force them to release their hands to dodge the attacks. But he never expected the Peach Valley Six Fairies to work together seamlessly. While four of them were holding the enemy's hands and legs, the remaining two were on the outside protecting. These two sword moves from Zuo

Lengchan were swift and fierce but they were successfully blocked by Peachtree Fruit Fairy and Peachtree Flower Fairy.

Actually, Yujizi's life was hanging by a thread. Zuo Lengchan had used his inner energy when he was trading blows with Peachtree Fruit Fairy and Peachtree Flower Fairy because he knew he must force these two people back within six moves. If he didn't manage to do this in six moves, then it might be too late to save Yujizi from being torn apart.

Zuo Lengchan immediately circled his long sword and the sword flashed. A moment later, Yujizi uttered a shout and his head hit the ground. Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Branch Fairy were now each holding an arm, and Peachtree Trunk Fairy was holding a leg. Only Peachtree Leaf Fairy was holding a leg which was still attached to the rest of Yujizi's body.

Zuo Lengchan knew he had no way of forcing the Peach Valley Six Fairies to release Yujizi quickly. So taking the bull by its horn, he chopped both of Yujizi's arms and one of his legs so the four fairies couldn't tear him apart. This situation was very similar to when your hand was bitten by a poisonous snake and you cut your arm off to save yourself. After Zuo Lengchan cut off three of Yujizi's limbs, he anticipated the Peach Valley Six Fairies would cease to give anymore trouble to this crippled man. So he retreated with a cold laughter.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Zuo Lengchan, you gave gold and pretty ladies to Yujizi so he helped you to become the headmaster. How come you cut off his arms and legs? Are you trying to silence him?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "He's afraid we would tear Yujizi into four pieces. That's why he came out to help. But he got the wrong idea."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "He thought he was being clever. What a pity. How funny. We grabbed Yujizi just to play around with him. Today is the opening day of the Five Mountains School, who would dare to kill people here?"



Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Yujizi really wanted to kill me. But we're friends from the same school, so why would we kill him? We only wanted to throw him up and down, scare him a bit. But Zuo Lengchan was crude, and his brain is muddled."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy, with his whole body drenched with Yujizi's blood, dragged the leg which was still connected to the body and dropped Yujizi in front of Zuo Lengchan while continuously shaking his head. He said, "Zuo Lengchan, you're too violent. How could you harm Yujizi like this? He doesn't have his two arms and one leg anymore, what should we call him from now on?"

Zuo Lengchan sucked a breath in anger and thought, "If I were just a bit slower, the four of you would've torn Yujizi into four pieces. How can he still live? How dare you to speak such words now! But I have no evidence to make this clear to everyone here."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Zuo Lengchan can kill Yujizi with a stab of his sword and give him a clean death. But instead he cut off his two arms and one leg to make him not alive, not dead. So merciless, so heartless."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Everyone is from the Five Mountains School. If we have any problem, let's talk about it. Why do you need to be so violent? You have no loyalty at all."

'Tower Holding Palm' Ding Mian said loudly, "You six weirdos, whether we move or not, you were going to tear him into four pieces. Headmaster Zuo went in to save Priest Yujizi precisely because he's from the same school. What you said was absurd."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "We were clearly just playing around with Yujizi but Zuo Lengchan thought it was real. It's hard to distinguish between real and fake. Zuo Lengchan was just being unwise."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "A gentleman takes responsibility for what he does. You have already harmed Yujizi but you're trying to deny it now. There's no valour in

what you're doing. There are so many heroes on this mountaintop who saw you chopped off Yujizi's two arms and leg. Do you think you can still deny it now?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Heartless, unrighteous, unwise, cowardly. How can this kind of person become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School? Zuo Lengchan, you must be dreaming." When he finished speaking, the six brothers shook their heads together.

Actually, the Taishan School's headmaster would've been torn into four pieces if Zuo Lengchan hadn't use his wonderful sword art to cut off Yujizi's two arms and one leg. The first class masters besides the worshipping place naturally could see this, and they were praising Zuo Lengchan's wonderful sword art in their hearts. But the Peach Valley Six Fairies declined this vehemently so it was hard for other people to dispute them. The people who knew that Zuo Lengchan had suffered an injustice found this really funny while the ones who didn't see the real reason felt that Zuo Lengchan behaved very crudely and violently; their faces showed their resentment.

Linghu Chong had already known the Peach Valley Six Fairies for a long time so he had a very good understanding of their characters. He thought, "The Peach Valley Six Fairies attacked Zuo Lengchan with every word they said today. How come their brains are so clear today? Most likely there's someone directing them from the side." He slowly walked closer to the Peach Valley Six Fairies to see which master was helping them, but he saw there was no one else standing beside the Peach Valley Six Fairies. The five brothers were busy trying to stem the bleeding on Peachtree Flower Fairy's shoulder. Linghu Chong turned his head around and gazed to the west. Suddenly he heard a very faint sound in his ear: "Brother Chong, are you looking for me?"

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy. Even though the voice was faint, he heard it clearly and it was Yingying's voice. He turned his head slightly to look at where that voice

was coming from. But what he saw was an extremely fat and bearded big man leaning on a big rock, lazily stretching his hand to scratch his head. On this Songshan mountaintop, there was at least around one to two hundred bearded big man so no one would pay any attention to them. Linghu Chong squinted his eyes, and suddenly he saw a cunning and charming smile in that person's eyes. He was exulted and walked towards her. Yingying transmitted her voice to him, "Don't come here, you'll ruin the secret." This voice was very faint, like it was coming from somewhere far.

Linghu Chong promptly halted his step and thought, "I don't know what kind of voice transmitting martial art you have, but it must be one of your father's secret." He immediately understood, "Those words the Peach Valley Six Fairies said were all taught by you. No wonder these six slow-witted people can say something like heartless, unrighteous, unwise, and cowardly." He felt really happy and wanted to show this. He loudly declared, "Peach Valley Seven Fairies' words are reasonable. I know the Peach Valley Six Fairies only have six fairies, but who could've thought they have one more clever and beautiful seventh fairy, the female fairy, Peachtree Calyx Fairy!"<sup>3</sup>

When the crowd heard Linghu Chong suddenly saying some inanity unexpectedly, they were all startled. Yingying transmitted her voice, "This is a very critical time. You're the headmaster of the Heng-Shan School, so don't say any nonsense. Zuo Lengchan is backed into a corner now, so this is your good opportunity to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster."

Linghu Chong was alarmed and he thought, "Yingying disguised herself so that she could be here at Songshan and help me become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. She's the daughter of the Sun Moon Sect's Chief, and currently a mortal enemy of the orthodox sects. If she's discovered, it's going to be very dangerous. She's braving danger just to help me gain a name in Wulin. She has such

deep feelings towards me. I... I... I really don't know how to repay her."

He then heard Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Great Master Fangzheng is such a senior master but you're not willing for him to become the headmaster. Yujizi has no arm and no leg. Zuo Lengchan is heartless and unrighteous. So naturally, neither of them can become the headmaster anymore. Let's choose a young hero who has the world's

number one sword art to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. If there's anyone who doesn't accept this, then there's no harm in trying out his sword art." As he said this, he opened his left palm and extended his arm towards Linghu Chong.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "This young hero Linghu is Heng-Shan School's headmaster. He has a deep relationship with Huashan School's Mr. Yue, and he's also a good friend of Hengshan School's Mr. Mo Da. Within the five mountains sword schools, three schools have supported him."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Taishan School's priests are all insects (sounds similar to Linghu Chong's name), so most of them naturally support him and not many would go against him."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Everyone in the Five Mountains School uses a sword. So whoever has the highest sword art will, of course, without a doubt, become the headmaster."

Peachtree Flower Fairy pressed on the injury on his shoulder and said, "Zuo Lengchan, if you don't accept, there's no harm in competing swords with young hero Linghu. Whoever wins will become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. This is called the leadership challenge sword fight!"

Among the people who had come to Songshan, besides the people from the five mountains sword schools and people like Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and others with an interest in the events, most of the people who came here

were looking for some entertainment. Everyone knew that if the merger of the five schools were successful then there would be fighting to decide for the headmaster position. These Jianghu people really didn't care for lengthy debates. They didn't mind when the Peach Valley Six Fairies were entangling Zuo Lengchan with words and saying interesting things. But if everyone were to talk the way Yue Buqun did, and talk until the sun goes down, it would definitely bore the hell out of everyone there. So hearing Peachtree Flower Fairy say "leadership challenge sword fight", they cheered and applauded loudly.

The crowd had seen Priest Tianmen die miserably and they had also seen Zuo Lengchan chopping off limbs. These two events could be said to be scary and too close to reality. But the contest to decide on the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School would involve masters and they would be able to see a few good fights. This would more than satisfy their cravings. That was why the crowd was applauding and cheering excitedly.

Linghu Chong thought, "I promised Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu that I will block Zuo Lengchan from becoming the Five Mountains School's headmaster so that he can't cause a disaster in Wulin. But if Master becomes the headmaster, him being a just and fair person, naturally people will be pleased and willing to accept him. Besides him, who else in the five mountains sword schools can do this job?" With a loud voice, he said, "How could everyone forget a most suitable person for this position? If we don't elect the Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue to become our headmaster, whom else can we choose? Mr. Yue's martial art is very high and his knowledge is outstanding. He's also righteous and compassionate towards people. This is well known, otherwise, how could he have gained the name 'Gentleman Sword'? My Heng-Shan School elects Mr. Yue to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster." After he

said this, the disciples of Huashan School applauded and cheered.

From among the Songshan School, someone said, "Even though Mr. Yue is not the wrong choice, he's still below Headmaster Zuo by a notch." Another person said, "Headmaster Zuo has been the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Schools for so many years already. It's very reasonable that he becomes the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Why do we need to elect someone else?" Another person said, "In my opinion, the headmaster of the Five Mountains School must be Headmaster Zuo and none other. Then we'll establish four vice positions for Mr. Yue, Mr. Mo Da, young hero Linghu, and Priest Yu... Yu... Yu... either Priest Yuqingzi or Priest Yuyinzi. That'll be appropriate."

Peachtree Branch Fairy called out, "Yujizi is not dead yet. He only has two shorter arms and a shorter leg. You don't want him anymore?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Sword fight, sword fight! Whoever has the best martial art should become the headmaster!"

The thousands of Jianghu people echoed this sentiment by shouting, "Right! Right! Sword fight, sword fight!"

Linghu Chong thought, "In the situation today, Zuo Lengchan must be overthrown first. Then Songshan School will lose their leadership. Otherwise, my Master would never become the Five Mountains School's headmaster." He immediately drew his sword and called out, "Mr. Zuo, all the realm's heroes are here. They all want us to have a sword fight to take the leadership. What do you say if we start first?" He inwardly pondered, "Zuo Lengchan's cold palm is very formidable, and my bare hand martial art is nothing compared to his, but I wouldn't lose to him when it comes to sword art. After I've won against Zuo Lengchan, I'll lose to Master and no one would be able to say anything. If Mr. Mo Da were to fight, he won't necessarily be able to beat Master. Two masters from the Taishan School are injured and dead, so

they wouldn't have anyone who could compete well enough anymore. If my sword art isn't Zuo Lengchan's match and I lose to him, I would've still exhausted a lot of his internal energy. My Master can fight him afterwards and have a very good chance of winning." He hacked twice with his long sword and said, "Mr. Zuo, everyone in the five mountains sword schools uses sword, so we'll decide this with a sword." He said this first to prevent Zuo Lengchan from suggesting they fight barehanded.

The crowd called out one by one, "Young hero Linghu is quick with his word, fight with the sword." "The winner becomes the headmaster, the loser gets ready to receive his order. That's a fair deal, that's the best way." "Mr. Zuo, get down and accept this challenge. What are you scrupling about, afraid to lose?" "You already talked for half a day, what else is there to say? Go and fight!"

In a moment, that Songshan mountaintop was all a clamour with shouts. Everyone was shouting; even the most experienced seniors were shouting. These people were invited by Zuo Lengchan, but this matter of who would become the Five Mountains School's headmaster had nothing to do with them. They originally didn't want to butt in, but a martial art competition to take the leadership would be very exciting to watch, so they were all hoping to watch a few good fights. With this added urgings from the guests, it became imperative that if they didn't have a competition then this headmaster position would not be decided.

Linghu Chong was very happy to see this and he called out, "Mr. Zuo, if you're not willing to cross swords with me, how can you be the Five Mountains School's headmaster in the presence of all these people?"

The crowd called out one by one, "Sword fight, sword fight! Not fighting isn't for a hero, but for a dog!"

Many people from the Songshan School knew Linghu Chong's sword art was wonderful, and Zuo Lengchan could not be guaranteed a win against him. But there was no good

reason to say why Zuo Lengchan couldn't compete swords with him. So all they could do was scowl and stay silent. In all the clamour, a clear voice was heard, "All the heroes here want a sword fight to decide the Five Mountains School's headmaster. We can't just brush away their wonderful idea." The person who said this was Yue Buqun.

The crowd called out, "Mr. Yue is right, sword fight to take the leadership, sword fight to take the leadership!"

Yue Buqun said, "Sword fight to take the leadership is one thing. But the real intention of our five mountains sword schools merging into one is to lessen the fighting between schools. That's why in this martial art competition, once the result is decided you must stay your hand and not take your opponent's life. Otherwise, it would be a great violation against the real intention of our five mountains school's merger."

When the crowd heard him talking of leadership, they all quietened down. A big man said, "That's all good, but sabres and swords don't have eyes. So if you die, that's your own bad luck. Who can you blame?" Another person said, "If you're afraid of death or injury, go hide at home and hug your doll. Why would you be here to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster?" The crowd burst into laughter.

Yue Buqun said, "Even so, to be injury free is always wonderful. I only have a few shallow ideas, but please consider them."

Someone called out, "Quickly fight! What else is there to say?" Another person said, "Don't blindly disturb him. Hear what Mr. Yue has to say." The person before said, "Who's disturbing? Go home and ask your darling!" The other person hurled abuses back.

Yue Buqun said, "Anyone here is entitled to participate in the leadership sword fight, but there are some stipulations..." His internal energy was abundant. When he talked, he completely drowned the voices of those people hurling



abuses at each other. They turned around to listen to him continue, "The leadership martial art competition is to contend for the leadership of the Five Mountains School. For that reason, if you're not a member of the Five Mountains School, you can't come and fight even if you have heavenly skills. Otherwise, this fight would be called 'World's Number One' fight, and not a way to decide the leadership of the Five Mountains School."

The crowd all answered, "Right! Non-members of the Five Mountains School can't come and compete." There was also a person who said, "Let's all fight to become the 'World's Number One'; that's also good!" This person was obviously talking nonsense, so no one replied to him.

Yue Buqun said, "Concerning this martial art competition, about not taking other's life and not injuring people from the same school, Mr. Zuo, please tell us what you think."

Zuo Lengchan coldly said, "Of course you cannot take another person's life in this fight. But not to injure other people would be very difficult. What's Mr. Yue's esteemed opinion in this?"

Yue Buqun said, "I believe the best way would be to ask Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, Beggar Clan Leader Xie, Qingcheng School Priest Yu, and other virtuous senior masters in Wulin to be judges. Who wins and who loses will be decided by them to avoid people fighting endlessly. We're just deciding the leadership, not life and death."

Fangzheng said, "Good, good! 'Deciding the leadership and not life and death', these words will stop blood from being spilled. What does Mr. Zuo think?"

"Since it's Great Master's concern for my humble sect, I'll definitely obey it. We were originally the five mountains sword schools, so each school should send out one person to compete in swords to take the leadership. Otherwise, each school will send out hundreds of people and the competition will drag on for years without any conclusion," Zuo Lengchan replied.

The crowd felt that it wouldn't be very lively if there were only five people fighting. But if each school were to send out its headmaster, then no one else from any of the schools would be able to put up a challenge anyway. They then heard the people from Songshan School cheering, so no one else objected to this.

Peachtree Branch Fairy suddenly said, "Taishan School's headmaster is Yujizi. Will this ox-nosed priest with no arms and no leg also come forth and compete?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy replied, "He's only missing both arms and a leg, why can't he go forth and compete? He still has one remaining leg. He can take off and kick people."

When the crowd heard this, they couldn't help laughing.

Yuyinzi from Taishan School indignantly said, "These six weirdos harmed my martial brother Yujizi and made him a cripple. Yet, they're still here ridiculing him. I want each of their arms and legs cut off. Come, let's fight one on one!" After he said this, he immediately drew his sword out and stood there. This Yuyinzi was tall and thin, and had an imposing appearance. As he stood there with a solemn demeanour and with his priest robe floating in the wind, he looked really grand. The crowd cheered for him.

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "From the Taishan School, you're the one who's going to compete for the leadership?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Were you selected by your school or did you volunteer yourself?"

Yuyinzi replied, "How does that concern you?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Of course it concerns us. Not only it concerns us, it greatly concerns us, it extremely concerns us. If you were selected by the Taishan School to compete for the leadership, then once you lose, Taishan School's second person cannot compete again."

Yuyinzi said, "The second person cannot come out to compete, so what?"

Suddenly someone from the Taishan School said, "Martial Brother Yuyinzi isn't my choice. If he lose, of course, another

master from Taishan School can go out." The person who said this was Yuqingzi.

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Haha, another master; is that you?"

"Good, maybe it's me," Yuqingzi answered.

Peachtree Fruit Fairy called out, "Everyone look. Taishan School again has an internal strife. Priest Tianmen has already died and Priest Yuji is injured. These two people are again fighting to become Taishan School's headmaster."

"Nonsense!" Yuyinzi retorted.

But Yuqingzi was smiling coldly and didn't say anything.

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "So who's going to compete for the Taishan School?"

Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi answered at the same time, "Me!"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Alright, the two of you fight first and see who's stronger. Talking won't clear it up but there will definitely be a winner and a loser after you fight."

Yuqingzi came out and waved his hand. "Martial brother, step back! Don't get ridiculed by other people."

"Why would other people ridicule me? Martial Brother Yuji was heavily injured, I just want to take revenge for him," Yuyinzi interjected.

"Are you taking revenge or competing for the leadership?"

"Do you think we can be the Five Mountains School's headmaster based on our measly skills? Isn't that absurd? Everyone from Taishan School has unanimously supported Chief Zuo to be our Five Mountains School's headmaster a long time ago. Why would we two brothers go out and be shamed?" Yuyinzi reasoned.

"In that case, step back. I'm the eldest in Taishan School right now."

Yuyinzi coldly laughed and said, "Hmmp, you might be the oldest, but looking at what you do every day, do you think anyone in the school still respects you?"

Yuqingzi became angry and said fiercely, "What's your meaning? You refuse to acknowledge the order of seniority? What's our school's number one rule?"

"Haha, don't forget, we're now members of the Five Mountains School. We entered the Five Mountains School at the same year, same month, same time. What order of seniority? The rules of the Five Mountains School haven't been drawn up yet, so what number one, number two? You mentioned the Taishan School's rule to keep me under control. It's a pity there's only Five Mountains School now," Yuyinzi said.

Yuqingzi didn't know what to say. His left hand pointed at Yuyinzi's nose and he angrily said, "You... you... you..."

The thousands of men called out, "Fight! See who's got higher skills!"

The long sword in Yuqingzi's hand kept trembling but he didn't put it up. Even though he was older, he was always drowning himself in wine, and his sword art wasn't as good as Yuyinzi. Even after the five mountains sword schools merged, it would be inevitable that each of the five schools would still be separated physically on five mountains. Thus, each mountain would have a leader. Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi knew their skills were far below Zuo Lengchan, so they had no plan to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. But they were thinking of who would become the leader once they got back to their mountain. At this time, the crowd was very excited waiting for the brothers to clash weapons. Yuqingzi did not dare to fight rashly but he really resented Yuyinzi for shaming him in front of the realm's heroes. Moreover, Zuo Lengchan was likely to install Yuyinzi as the leader on Taishan, so he would be bound to follow Yuyinzi's order from now on and he would never be able to hold his head high again. For the moment, the two brothers were staring angrily at each other. Neither of them wanted to back down.

Suddenly, someone in the crowd with a sharp voice said, "I see the two of you haven't even grasped the slightest bit of

Taishan School's martial art essence. You really have thick faces to be quarrelling right here and wasting everyone's time."

Everyone turned to have a look at the person who said this. They saw a tall handsome youth with a beautiful appearance whose face was pale and whose mouth turned up at the corner carrying a cold mocking smile. He was Lin Pingzhi of the Huashan School.

Someone recognised him and called out, "He's Huashan School's Mr. Yue's new son-in-law."

Linghu Chong thought, "Martial Brother Lin has always been very cautious and doesn't speak very much. After not seeing him for just a while, I'm surprised he now actually dared to ridicule these two traitors in front of everyone here."

Yuqingzi, Yuyinzi, and Yujizi were in cahoots in harming Priest Tianmen to get on Zuo Lengchan's good side, so Linghu Chong already felt resentful towards these two priests. When Lin Pingzhi insulted them, he felt quite happy.

Yuyinzi said, "If you say I haven't grasped the slightest bit of Taishan School's martial art, does that mean you've grasped it all? Then please use Taishan School's martial art and let our eyes be opened." He said the words 'Taishan School' especially loudly. His meaning was, "You're a Huashan School's disciple, but even if you have strong martial art, it would still be Huashan School's and you couldn't possibly use my Taishan School's martial art".

Lin Pingzhi gave a cold sneer and said, "Taishan School's martial art is deep and profound. How can traitors like you who harmed your own school member be able to understand..."

"Ping'er," Yue Buqun shouted. "Priest Yuyinzi is still your elder, don't be rude!"

"Yes!" Lin Pingzhi responded.

Yuyinzi indignantly said, "Mr. Yue, what a good disciple and son-in-law you have! He can even speak nonsense about Taishan School's martial art."

Suddenly, a female voice said, "How do you know for sure he was speaking nonsense?"

A good looking young woman stepped out. Her skirt was brushing the ground, her belts were floating in the wind, and a red flower was inserted into her hair. It was Yue Lingshan. She was carrying a long sword on her back and her raised right hand held the sword handle. She said, "I'll use Taishan School's sword art and ask for your advice."

Yuyinzi knew she was Yue Buqun's daughter. He was thinking that since Yue Buqun had approved the merger of the five schools earlier, at the moment Zuo Lengchan would be on friendly terms with him, so he didn't dare to offend her. He smiled slightly and said, "Congratulations Miss Yue. Are you angry because I didn't come to your wedding and drank your celebratory wine? I admired your noble school's wonderful sword art. But this is the first time I've heard of Huashan School's disciples being able to use Taishan School's sword art."

Yue Lingshan raised her eyebrows and said, "My father wants to be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. So, naturally, he has researched the sword arts of each of the five schools. Otherwise, even if my father wins against the other four schools' headmasters, if he used only Huashan School's swordsmanship, he can't become the Five Mountains School's headmaster."

When these words were said, it created a sensation through the crowd. A person queried, "Mr. Yue wants to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster?" Another person shouted, "Mr. Yue also knows how to use Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, and Heng-Shan Schools' martial arts?"

Yue Buqun said in a clear voice, "My daughter talks irresponsibly. Don't worry about what my little kid said."

But Yue Lingshan continued, "Martial Uncle Zuo, if you can use Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, and Heng-Shan Schools' sword arts to defeat the masters of each school, then we'll naturally submit and accept you as the Five

Mountains School's headmaster. Otherwise, although your Songshan School's sword art is very formidable in the world, it's still only the Songshan School's sword art which is good, and has nothing to do with the other four schools at all."

The crowd all thought these words were right. If someone was proficient with the sword arts of each school, then he should become the Five Mountains School's headmaster and this would be very fitting. But each school's sword arts had undergone countless of refinements for hundreds of years by many masters. Even if someone was taught by a master of each school, and had undergone dozens of years of practice, he might not necessarily be able to fully learn all of the sword arts from the five schools let alone the secret skills of each school that wasn't usually passed down to ordinary disciples. The possibility of someone actually grasping the essence of all the sword arts from all five schools at the same time was quite remote.

But Zuo Lengchan thought, "Why did Yue Buqun's daughter say this? She must have an intention for saying this. Has Yue Buqun become muddled? Does he really want to fight me for the Five Mountains School's leadership?"

Yuyinzi said, "So Mr. Yue is already proficient in the five schools' sword arts. This has never happened in the history of the five mountains sword schools before. I'd like to ask for Miss Yue's advice on Taishan School's swordsmanship."

"Very well!" Yue Lingshan shouted.

With a 'shua' sound, she drew the long sword she was carrying at her back. Yuyinzi was livid. "I'll compete with your father! A little girl like you dare to draw your sword against me!" He reasoned Yue Buqun would surely stop this. In his heart, he believed that the Yue couple was the only two people in Huashan School who would be able to fight him. How would he know Yue Buqun would only shake his head, sigh, and say, "My little kid doesn't know how high the heaven is. Senior Yuyin and Yuqing are Taishan School's number one masters, and you actually want to use Taishan

School's sword art to fight against them. Isn't that asking for trouble?"

Yuyinzi was startled. He thought, "Yue Buqun told his daughter to use Taishan School's sword art to fight against me." He took a glance and saw that Yue Lingshan's long sword was in her right hand and it was pointing down at an angle. Her left palm was wide open and she started counting with her fingers. At the count of five, her left hand made a fist. Then she again extended her thumb out, her forefinger, and counted to five. Her five fingers were now spread open. She followed this by counting again starting from her thumb. This time, as her middle finger folded, Yuyinzi was greatly alarmed: "How could this baby know the move 'Daizong Way'?"<sup>4</sup>

More than thirty years ago, Yuyinzi had heard from his master the essence of the move 'Daizong Way'. This sword art move was regarded as Taishan School's highest and most profound skill. Its essence wasn't at the sword moves on the right hand, but was at the counting with the left hand. The left hand would be continuously counting. It would be counting the enemy's position, the enemy's martial art, his height, dimensions of his weapon, as well as the height of the sun and many other things. The calculations were very complicated, and once the calculations were finished, the sword would immediately attack and it would hit its target. In the past, Yuyinzi had thought of this sword move and felt he didn't have the ability to memorise and count all sorts of numbers in such a short time during a fight. So he didn't learn this skill deeply and only heard of its existence and put it at the back of his mind. His master was also actually not proficient at this technique. He only said, "This 'Daizong Way' technique is very difficult to learn and doesn't seem practical at all; but its power is unmatched. Since you don't have the desire to learn it, you won't be able to learn this sword move, but it doesn't matter. All of your martial brothers aren't as attentive as you, so they also wouldn't be able to learn this



move. It's a pity this profound sword art, with no match in this world, will be lost to us from now on." When his master didn't force him to learn this sword move, Yuyinzi felt relieved. Later on, he had never seen anyone in Taishan School practiced this move ever again.

Therefore, it was to his surprise that dozens of years later, he would see Yue Lingshan, who was only a young woman, use this move. All of a sudden, sweat started to form on his forehead. He had never heard his master talk about countering this move. He believed that since he couldn't practice it, other people wouldn't be able to practice this wonderful sword art either; so he never thought of a way to counter this sword move himself. But now the strangest thing had happened and it was completely outside of his expectations. He was feeling really worried and pondered to himself, "If I rapidly change my positions, leap high and crouch low, she naturally would block me."

He immediately shook his long sword and slid three steps to the right using the move 'Clear Moon on a Cloudless Sky'. Then he turned around, lowered his body, and slantingly pierced his long sword. His sword was still five feet away from Yue Lingshan's right shoulder when he turned another circle and followed with the move 'High Mountain Sky' with a fast stab forward and fast pull back of the sword. But Yue Lingshan just stood her ground unmoving. The long sword in her right hand constantly trembled, while the fingers on her left hand unceasingly counted. Yuyinzi launched his sword with his body following it. He turned to the left side and then the right side, and with each turn he became even faster.

This pattern of sword art was called 'Taishan Eighteen Coils', and it was created by someone in the Taishan School a long time ago. That person observed that Taishan School's eighteen coils of the three gates were very complicated. It was really an arduous path with its five steps of revolution and ten steps of circles. As a result, he harmonised the sword art with the lay of the land, and it was now just as wonderful

and strange as the Eight Diagrams' 'Eight Diagrams Palm Movement'. Taishan's 'Eighteen Coils' attacked higher with each coil and became more dangerous with each step. These patterns of sword moves also become more violent with each turn. All of Yuyinzi's attack seemed to have pierced through Yue Lingshan's body, but actually, none of his attacks was a genuine killing move. Both of his eyes were fixated on Yue Lingshan's ceaselessly counting left hand. In the years past, his master once said, "This move 'Daizong Way' can be said to be the ancestor of our Taishan School's sword art. It never misses and will never need a second stroke to kill someone. When a sword art reaches this stage, it has surpassed everything and has become godly. Your master actually only knows some basic skills of this skill, and if I actually wanted to learn it, then it might be easier said than done." When he thought of his master's words, cold sweat seeped through his back.

That Taishan's 'Eighteen Coils' was divided into 'Slow Eighteen, Fast Eighteen'. The eighteen coils turned slowly and the other eighteen coils turned quickly. Each step was higher than the next, and it was said 'The person at the back will only see the soles of the shoes of the person in front, while the person at the front will only see the hair of the person at the back'. This pattern of sword art of the Taishan School was created from the steep mountain paths going up Mount Taishan. The movements were suddenly slow and suddenly fast, punctuated by very complicated turnings.

Linghu Chong saw Yue Lingshan not blocking or dodging while the fingers on her left hand kept on stretching and folding as if she was counting something. He couldn't help feeling worried and wanted to shout out, "Little martial sister, be careful!" But these five words were stuck in his throat and he couldn't call out. Yuyinzi was about to finish his sword pattern, but from the start, he didn't dare to actually attack Yue Lingshan and his long sword was always two feet away from her body. Yue Lingshan abruptly stabbed her sword out

and executed five moves. Each sword move had an ancient meaning behind it.

"Five Gigantic Swords!" The words escaped Yuqingzi's mouth.

Mount Taishan had some very ancient pines. According to an old story, they were given the names 'Five Gigantic Pines' during the Qin period when their branches were sticking out and their green leaves covered one another. The martial uncle of Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi made a set of sword arts and called it the 'Five Gigantic Swords'. The moves in this set of sword art looked plain but contained wonderful variations. More than twenty years ago, Yuqingzi had studied this set of sword arts deeply and when he saw Yue Lingshan's execution of these five moves, the moves looked right and wrong at the same time. Yue Lingshan's moves were different from the ones he had studied, but were of a higher level compared to the ones he knew. As he stood greatly astonished, Yue Lingshan suddenly bent her waist and thrust her sword towards him. She called out, "Is this your Taishan School's sword art?"

Yuqingzi hastily lifted his sword to block and called out, "'Crane Coming to a Clear Fountain.' It's our Taishan's sword art, but..." Even though the sword was already withdrawn, he was still startled and his whole body broke into a cold sweat. When the enemy's sword came just then, the position was different from the one he had studied. That sword was dangerously close to piercing his chest.

Yue Lingshan said, "Doesn't matter, it's Taishan's sword art!"

With a 'shua' sound, she slashed her sword towards Yuyinzi.

Yuqingzi said, "Stone Block, Horse Returning! You're using it... wrongly..."

Yue Lingshan said, "You remember the sword move's name."

She swung her long sword and slashed it twice. Yuyinzi cried out loudly, and almost at the same instant, Yuqingzi's right knee was also stabbed. Yuqingzi staggered for a bit before his right leg folded underneath him and he dropped to his knee. He quickly drove his sword down powerfully to support himself, but the point of his sword just happened to hit a piece of rock, and it was broken into two pieces. But he was mumbling to himself, "'Three Happiness'! But... but..."

Yue Lingshan laughed icily and put her sword back into the sheath at her back.

The spectators promptly burst into cheers. Such a pretty young lady unexpectedly used Taishan School's sword art to defeat two of Taishan School's masters in such a short time. Her sword art was wonderful, and the people who saw the sword art display felt themselves soothed. The applause they gave her reverberated throughout the valley.

Zuo Lengchan and the other Songshan School's masters looked at each other, and all of them were hesitating. They all thought, "This little girl can actually use Taishan's sword art. But there's some big alterations and her sword moves are very violent. This little girl can't possibly be the one who thought of them; it must be Yue Buqun who imparted them to her. To actually finished learning all these sword moves probably took many, many days. If Yue Buqun has deliberately planned all these, then his will is in no way small."

Yuyinzi suddenly called out, "You... You... This isn't 'Daizong Way'!"

After he was injured, he suddenly realised Yue Lingshan wasn't displaying the moves from 'Daizong Way'. Actually, it could be said that she could take victory in just one move if she used that move, but he didn't understand why she still had to use 'Five Gigantic Sword', 'Crane Coming to a Clear Fountain', 'Stone Block, Horse Returning', 'Three Happiness' sword moves? What was more exasperating was that she actually added some modifications to the key aspects of the

Taishan School's sword moves she used. His martial brother and he hurriedly thought of this but they didn't have much time so they automatically used the counter sword moves they had been practising for dozens of years already. But her sword positioning differed greatly and the two brothers were inadvertently defeated. If she had actually used another school's sword art, no matter what move it was or how wonderful, they would not have lost to this young woman. But she was really using the real sword arts of Taishan School, so they felt shame, anger, and surprise mixed together, and couldn't accept that they had lost to her.

Linghu Chong was bewildered when he saw Yue Lingshan using those sword moves to defeat her opponents. He suddenly heard someone behind him whispered, "Master Linghu, did you teach her those moves?" Linghu Chong turned his head around and saw it was Tian Boguang who asked him. He shook his head.

Tian Boguang smiled slightly and said, "That day on top of Huashan when I fought with you, I remember you used that crane coming whatever. But you weren't familiar with the move at that time." Linghu Chong was at a loss as if he didn't hear what Tian Boguang said.

As soon as Yue Lingshan started her attack, he already realised she was using the Taishan School's sword arts engraved on the wall at the cave behind the Cliff of Contemplation. But he had never mentioned to anyone the existence of the cave behind the Cliff of Contemplation. He also remembered that he had covered the hole to the cave's entrance when he left. So how did Yue Lingshan discover it? His thought continued, "Since I could discover the cave, of course little martial sister could also discover it. Moreover, I opened up the entrance by accident. Little martial sister could've easily found it too." Inside the cave, he had seen the unique skills of the five mountains' sword arts as well as Devil Sect's elders' engraving of the methods to break those sword arts. Although he was familiar with those moves

engraved on the wall, he didn't know any of their names. The last three moves used by Yue Lingshan resembled the passing clouds and flowing water; indicating that she knew the movements very well. She managed to injure two masters of the Taishan School using these three moves and she unleashed the moves incisively. Linghu Chong inwardly praised her for this.

When he heard Yuqingzi said 'Three Happiness', he remembered the time he went with Master to Mount Taishan. After they had passed the Water Sign Cave, they encountered a long and steep mountain road which was named 'Three Happiness'. The meaning behind these words was that the length of the slope was three li, and after passing the road, you would be very happy to have done so. He never thought that sword move was actually inspired by the slope.

A thin old man slowly stepped out and said, "Mr. Yue has grasped the essence of the sword arts from each of the five mountains sword schools. This has never happened in Wulin before. I want to study my school's sword art and see how much I actually understand. I'd like to consult Mr. Yue today." From the shining huqin held in his left hand, he drew out a really thin short sword with his right hand. He was Hengshan School's headmaster, Mr. Mo Da.

Yue Lingshan bowed and said, "Martial Uncle Mo, please show mercy. I've only just casually learned a few moves of the Hengshan School's sword art. Martial Uncle Mo, please give some advice."

Mr. Mo Da had said 'I'd like to consult Mr. Yue today'. He actually wanted to fight against Yue Buqun, but Yue Lingshan unexpectedly replied to him and clearly said that she was going to use Hengshan School's sword art. Mr. Mo Da had a prestigious reputation in Jianghu. The crowd heard Zuo Lengchan said that Great Songyang Palm Fei Bin died under Mr. Mo Da's sword, so they all thought, "Yue Lingshan used Taishan School's sword art to injure two masters of the

Taishan School. Could she also use Hengshan's sword art to match him?"

Mr. Mo Da smiled. "Very good, very good! Great, great!"

"If I'm not Martial Uncle's match, then my father will fight."

Mr. Mo Da said repeatedly, "You're my match, you're my match!"

The short sword was slowly pointed out. It suddenly trembled and emitted a humming sound. From the humming noise, two thrust suddenly shot out. Yue Lingshan lifted her sword to block, but Mr. Mo Da's short sword was like a ghost as it suddenly went around behind Yue Lingshan's body. Yue Lingshan hastily turned around. Then she heard two humming sound besides her ears and saw a clump of hair floating past her. It was her own hair which had been cut off by Mr. Mo Da. She was anxious and quickly thought, "He's showing mercy, otherwise his sword could've killed me just then. Since he's not going to harm me, I can just attack him."

She didn't care about her opponent's sword path anymore. With two thrust, she aimed at Mr. Mo Da's lower abdomen and forehead. Mr. Mo Da was slightly startled and thought, "These two moves are 'Quan Ming Furong' and 'Crane Soaring to Zige'. These are my Hengshan School's unique skills. How did she learn them?"

Mount Hengshan had seventy two peaks and the five highest peaks were Furong, Zige, Shilin, Tianzhu, and Zhurong. Among the Hengshan School's sword art, there were five groups of sword arts named after each of those highest peaks. Mr. Mo Da saw that the moves Yue Lingshan used just then was the 'one move containing one group' move which meant this one move contained the essences of dozens of sword arts from that one group.

'Furong Sword Art' contained thirty six moves and 'Zige Sword Art' contained forty four moves, and each of these two sword groups contained the essences of dozens of moves. When they were simplified and harmoniously combined into

one move, that one move would be very powerful and would be offensive and defensive at the same time. 'Quan Ming Furong' and 'Crane Soaring to Zige' were two of these combined moves and they both made up part of the Hengshan School's top sword arts which were called 'Hengshan's Five Divine Swords'. The crowd just heard the continuous sound of swords clashing and they didn't know who was actually attacking or defending. They also didn't know how many moves these two people had executed in that short time.

Mr. Mo Da had planned everything before making his move on this mountaintop. He had also thought of a way to counter this 'leadership challenge sword fight'. He didn't have the slightest thought of actually becoming the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, and he knew even better that he was no match for Zuo Lengchan or Linghu Chong. But he was the headmaster of Hengshan School, so he couldn't just bow his head and stand idle by during the leadership challenge sword fight.

He was angry at Yuqingzi for helping an evil person do evil and causing the death of Priest Tianmen. So his original plan was to have it out with that priest, but who would've thought that all three Zi of Taishan was injured beforehand, and the only remaining opponent who was his match was Yue Buqun.

When he was at Shaolin temple, he had already seen Yue Buqun's martial art clearly and he was sure that he wouldn't lose to Yue Buqun. But the one who came up to fight was unexpectedly Yue Buqun's daughter. He was already startled that Yue Lingshan was able to use Hengshan School's sword art. But he was now confounded as well as afraid to see that Yue Lingshan was able to use one of Hengshan School's highest sword arts: 'one move containing one group'. The year Mr. Mo Da's martial ancestors and martial uncle ancestors went to Mount Huashan to fight the Devil Sect's ten elders, many of them were killed. At that time, Mr. Mo



Da's master was still young and he had learnt all of these five groups of sword art such as the Furong and Zige. But he only knew the general idea of the 'one move containing one group' move such as the 'Quan Ming Furong' move and the 'Crane Soaring to the Zige' move, which were part of the Hengshan Five Divine Swords. Naturally, Mr. Mo Da didn't get detailed instructions of these moves from his master. But how could this young lady from another school suddenly use these precious sword moves?

Although Yue Lingshan used those two moves, the idea behind the moves eluded her understanding. Otherwise, Mr. Mo Da would've lost by the second move, excited as he was in seeing these moves. After he easily blocked the two moves, he saw Yue Lingshan's long sword dazzlingly executing the move 'Shilin Shu Sheng', followed by the move 'Tianzhu Cloud'. The principal of the 'Tianzhu Sword Art' was taken from the changes in the cloud, and it relied heavily on its strange variations. Its movements were very random and very hard to predict. When Mr. Mo Da saw Yue Lingshan used the move 'Tianzhu Cloud', he quickly made his decision. Instead of blocking the attack, he just walked past it. This so-called 'not blocking and walking past' was actually only good to hear. In reality, he was running away from the fight because he couldn't defeat the move. However, because the changes in his sword art were complicated, even at the moment he was running away, his short sword thrust to the east and slashed to the west and dazzled everyone there. Thus, no one knew he was actually just planning to run far away.

He knew that among the Hengshan's Five Divine Swords, besides the 'Quan Ming Furong', 'Crane Soaring to Zige', 'Shilin Shu Sheng', and 'Tianzhu Cloud', the most formidable move was called the 'Wild Goose Returning to Zhurong'. Among Hengshan's five highest peaks, Zhurong was the highest one. This 'Wild Goose Returning to Zhurong' move was also the most profound among the Hengshan's Five

Divine Swords. When Mr. Mo Da's master talked about this move, his descriptions were quite vague because he didn't understand the move clearly himself. If Yue Lingshan were to use this move, even if he didn't lose his life, it still would shame him. His heart was worried and he anxiously dodged and slashed out his short sword. "Even though she's learned these wonderful moves, it seems she can only use them stupidly and doesn't seem to be able to respond to an attack automatically using these moves. Unavoidable but I have to flirt with danger and fight her with all my strength. Otherwise, Mo Da won't have a face to show myself in Jianghu anymore."

He saw Yue Lingshan moving hesitantly and knew that she was undecided about what to do, whether to give chase or not. Mr. Mo Da gloomily called out, "What a shame! Youngsters have no experience at all."

Using the move 'Tianzhu Cloud', Yue Lingshan forced Mr. Mo Da to turn around and run. Although he covered this up cleverly and it didn't seem like he had lost, the masters around there had already seen his embarrassment in running away. If Yue Lingshan had stood still, taken her sword back, and cupped her fist saying, "Martial Uncle Mo, thanks for giving way! I offended you," then the winner and loser would've been decided.

With the position Mr. Mo Da had, how could he, after losing, still turn around and fight again with someone a generation lower than him? But Yue Lingshan unexpectedly hesitated, and actually gave Mr. Mo Da such a good opportunity. As Yue Lingshan started to smile showing her dimples and as her cherry-lipped mouth opened slightly like she was about to say something, Mr. Mo Da's short sword hummed and rushed towards her. This fast attack was the culmination of Mr. Mo Da's lifetime of practice. The sword was emitting the sound of a huqin, its light flickered everywhere, and in a flash the sword and its lights encircled Yue Lingshan. Yue Lingshan called out in alarm and retreated a few steps.

How could Mr. Mo Da give her time to use that move 'Wild Goose Returning to Zhurong'? The short sword in his hand was getting faster and faster executing the set 'Magical Thirteen Phantom Stances of Hengshan Mist' which was ever changing like the clouds and mist. The spectators couldn't help feeling dizzy from looking at it. If it weren't for the fact that the crowd felt that Mr. Mo Da was bullying the young, a man bullying a woman, they would've applauded a long time ago.

After Yue Lingshan used such moves like 'Quan Ming Furong', Linghu Chong had no more doubt she had used the sword arts from the engravings on the cave wall at the back of the Cliff of Contemplation. He pondered, "Why did little martial sister go up to the Cliff of Contemplation? Master and Master-Wife love her dearly; they would never have punished her to stay on that wild and dangerous cliff to meditate. No matter what kind of mistake she may have made, Master and Master-Wife would only reprimand her. The Cliff of Contemplation and the living quarters on Huashan peak aren't close to each other; the road between them is also very dangerous. Even if it were not my little martial sister but one of the female disciples, they wouldn't send her to live alone up there. Could it be that it was martial brother Lin who was punished to meditate on that cliff and little martial sister went up there every day to deliver him his meals, just like she did when she was attending to me back then?" As he thought of this, he couldn't help his chest feeling heated. He again thought, "Martial brother Lin is a quiet person and he also follows rules and customs strictly, as close as one could get to be a 'Little Gentleman Sword'. That was the reason why Master, Master-Wife, and little martial sister like him. How could he have erred to deserve punishment on that cliff top? He can't, he couldn't have, definitely not." He then thought, "Could it be little martial sister... little martial sister..." Suddenly, he remembered something buried deep in his heart. But this memory was buried too deep. As soon as

he recalled it, he immediately forgot about it again. He was stupefied for a moment. What did he remember? He couldn't recall it clearly. Just at that moment, he heard Yue Lingshan cried out in alarm. Her long sword flew out from her hand, her left foot slipped and she was now looking up from the ground. Mr. Mo Da extended his short sword and pointed it at her left shoulder. He smilingly said, "Please rise, there's no need to panic!"

Suddenly, a 'pai' sound was heard and the short sword on Mr. Mo Da's hand was broken. Yue Lingshan had grabbed a couple of rocks from the ground and smashed one rock towards Mr. Mo Da's sword with her left hand. The short sword was very thin and it immediately broke in two as soon as it was hit. Yue Lingshan followed this by tossing the other rock on her right hand to the left side. Mr. Mo Da was startled when his weapon broke. Now, he saw her tossing a piece of rock to her left side but there was no one there. It was really strange and he couldn't understand what her intention was.

As soon as the rock hit the ground, it rebounded and hit Mr. Mo Da on the right side of his chest. With a crack, a few of his ribs were broken and blood spouted out. This unpredictable movement by Yue Lingshan was wonderfully fast. Each move was done cleanly and with agility. Everyone was stupefied. They saw clearly that after Mr. Mo Da had taken the initiative, he stopped and said, "Please rise, there's no need to panic!" Those words were the proper words spoken after a senior had defeated a junior. But Yue Lingshan's picking up the two stones and the two moves that followed were actually fast as lightning and entirely unpredictable. But Linghu Chong understood. Those two moves used by Yue Lingshan were the moves made by the Devil Sect's ten elders to break Hengshan School's unique skills. But the engraving on the cave wall actually showed the use of a pair of copper hammer. Yue Lingshan used the two stones in lieu of the copper hammers. If she had wanted to use the stones while they were fighting, it was impossible

for her to do so. But once she has acquired the stones, to toss one of them out and for it to fly back, as long as she had practiced the move, the stones and copper hammers can be treated the same.

Flying over, Yue Buqun entered the battlefield and slapped Yue Lingshan on the cheek. He shouted, "Martial uncle Mo Da has clearly let you off. How dare you to be rude to him?"

He then stooped down to help Mr. Mo Da up and said, "Brother Mo, my daughter doesn't know what's good or bad, I'm really sorry. Please forgive her."

Mr. Mo Da smiled bitterly and said, "The female tiger of your school really is out of ordinary." After he said these words, he again spouted blood from his mouth. Two disciples from Hengshan School came out to support him back to the group.

Yue Buqun stared angrily at his daughter for a while before stepping back to the side. Linghu Chong saw Yue Lingshan's left cheek was swollen, and five finger prints were left on her cheeks. It was obvious her father didn't hit her lightly. Tears were flowing from Yue Lingshan's eyes, but her mouth was slightly turned down and her expression was steely. Linghu Chong remembered, "In the past when she and I were together at Huashan, when she was naughty and got scolded by Master and Master-Wife, she would feel wronged and she would look pitiful and cute. At that time, I would do anything to cheer her up. Little martial sister is most happy when she won a sword fight against me. I only have to do the same thing, appear as if I've negligently given her an opportunity, and not let her see that I deliberately let her..."

He thought till here when his previously elusive memory resurfaced and he suddenly thought clearly "Why would she be at the Cliff of Contemplation? It's most likely that when she got married, she thought of the deep feelings we used to have, so she went up there all by herself to think of the old days. I've already sealed up the entrance to the back cave

with rocks. It's not easy to find if you hadn't stayed up there for long. In that case, she must have stayed up there not just for a short time but probably went up there more than once." He turned his head to look at Lin Pingzhi and thought, "Martial brother Lin and she just got married so they should be happy and ecstatic. But how come his expression is melancholic? Little martial sister was just slapped by her father, but he didn't go and comfort her but acts like it has nothing to do with him. That's very unreasonable."

He thought Yue Lingshan went up the Cliff of Contemplation in order to chase after the feelings from the past, but it was only a one sided guess by him and in his mind's eyes, he imagined how Yue Lingshan cried her eyes out on the cliff, how she regretted marrying Lin Pingzhi, and how she grieved incessantly for disappointing his deep feelings for her. He lifted his head and saw Yue Lingshan stooping down to pick her sword up while her tears dropped onto the grass below. A blade of grass bowed down under a bead of tear. Linghu Chong suddenly felt impulsive, "I must make her smile!" In his eyes, this Songshan mountaintop had suddenly become the Jade Maiden Peak at Huashan and the thousands of people there had turned into trees. In his heart, there was only lovesickness and his most loved person who had cried after being hit by her father. For his whole life, he had cheered her countless of time, so how could he just ignore her at this time?

He strode out and said, "Little martial... little..." He immediately remembered that to cheer her up, he had to fight for real. With his heart drumming, he said, "You've defeated the headmasters of Taishan and Hengshan; your sword art isn't a small matter. My Heng-Shan School isn't convinced you can use Heng-Shan School's sword art. Why don't you fight me?"

Yue Lingshan slowly turned around, but she didn't lift her head and it seemed she was thinking of something. After a while, she slowly lifted her head and all of a sudden her

whole face was blushing. Linghu Chong said, "Although Mr. Yue's skill is high, I'm not convinced he's proficient in each of the five schools' sword arts."

Yue Lingshan lifted her head and said, "You're originally not from Heng-Shan School. Today, you're the Headmaster of Heng-Shan. Are you proficient in Heng-Shan School's sword art now?" Her face was still stained with tears.

Linghu Chong heard her words were soft and were quite friendly; he was delighted beyond measure. He quietly said to himself, "I must make it look real and don't let her see that I deliberately let her win." He then said, "This word 'proficient', I don't dare say it. But I've already been at Heng-Shan for a long time and have practised Heng-Shan's sword arts. So, we'll both use Heng-Shan School's sword art to fight each other. Whoever uses any other sword art will lose. What do you think?" He had already decided on a plan. His own sword art was much higher compared to her, which was a well known matter. If he pretended to lose, then other people would definitely see it and Yue Lingshan wouldn't believe it also. But while fighting, if he accidentally use a move from the 'Dugu Nine Swords' or the Huashan School's sword art, he would at the same time win but lose per agreement, and no one would doubt him.

Yue Lingshan replied, "Alright, we'll have a fight!" She lifted her long sword and draw a half circle before thrusting at Linghu Chong.

Heng-Shan School's female disciples gasped when they saw her movements. The crowd didn't recognise the move as Heng-Shan School's sword art, but when they heard the admiring gasp, they knew Yue Lingshan's move was really Heng-Shan School's sword art and that it was out of the ordinary.

The move she used was really one of the moves taken from the engravings on the cave wall at the back of the Cliff of Contemplation. Furthermore, it was one of the moves that

Linghu Chong had imparted to the Heng-Shan School's disciples.

Linghu Chong wielded his sword to block. He knew Heng-Shan School's sword art had movements which shifted unceasingly in many circles and were very tight. Each movement of the sword art looked soft but actually contained powerful strength. When fighting an opponent, nine out of ten moves were defending and only one move would take advantage of a flaw to make a surprise attack. He had been together with the Heng-Shan School's disciples for a long time, and he had also personally seen Dingjing Shi Tai fought a few times against the enemies. Now when he executed the sword moves, every move was circling with meticulous intention. It was obvious he had already grasped the essence of Heng-Shan School's sword art deeply. Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, Beggar Clan's leader, Zuo Lengchan, and many other people who were familiar with Heng-Shan School's sword art knew that Linghu Chong was really not from Heng-Shan School, but the Heng-Shan sword art he used was proper and right. Even the most common style still contained a secret attack which thoroughly fit the Heng-Shan's martial art principle of 'Needle in a Cotton'. They all inwardly praised him.

They all knew Heng-Shan School had been led by nuns for the last hundreds of years. For people of Buddhist faith, mercy is the foundation of everything. In particular, it was not suitable for women to use reckless movements, as they studied martial art primarily to protect themselves. This principle of 'Needle in a Cotton' was like concealing a needle in a wad of cotton. Provided that other people didn't offend, then the cotton would be soft and wouldn't harm them. But if you use strength to crush it, then the needle inside the cotton would pierce your palm. Whether it would pierce shallowly or deeply doesn't depend on the strength of the steel needle, but depends on the power you apply to crush the cotton. If you crush it lightly then the injury would be



light, if you use a lot of strength then the injury would be heavy. This kind of martial art principle is based on the retribution principle of Buddhism; you sow your own destiny and the good and bad come from your own heart.

After Linghu Chong had learned the 'Dugu Nine Swords', he came to understand the essence of set form martial arts well. He had learned to use sword arts with an emphasis on intention and not on set movements. So when he used the Heng-Shan sword art at this time, the changes at various places were quite different from the original form, but the sword intention of the Heng-Shan's sword art was still clearly maintained. Even though the masters from other schools knew of Heng-Shan's sword art, they only knew of the main points and didn't know the finer points and changes in the sword art. So when they saw the sword intention displayed by Linghu Chong, they all thought, "This youngster didn't get lucky in becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster! He's actually the true heir appointed by Dingxian and Dingjing Shi Tai." Only Heng-Shan School's disciples like Yihe and Yiqing were able to see that the sword forms he used were different from the ones taught by their masters. Even though the forms were different, they realized that the meaning behind these sword moves were deeper than the original sword art. Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan were both using Heng-Shan School's sword arts engraved inside the cave at the Cliff of Contemplation. But Linghu Chong's sword art was originally much higher compared to Yue Lingshan. Added to that he had also been together with Heng-Shan School's disciples for many days, so he knew the scope of Heng-Shan School's sword arts better than Yue Lingshan. As the two of them fought, if it weren't for Linghu Chong deliberately giving way, he would've won in just a few moves. After fighting for more than thirty moves, Yue Lingshan had exhausted the moves she learned from the cave wall and was forced to repeat them. It was good that this set of sword art was very complicated and looked really pleasant with its

circling movements. There was not much distinction evident between each move. From the first move to the thirty-sixth move, they looked just like one big move. Besides Linghu Chong who had also learned this sword art from the cave wall, no one else could tell that she was repeating the sword moves.

The sword moves Yue Lingshan used were very tight, and Linghu Chong followed the proper method to counter each one of them. The two of them had learned the same identical sword moves which contained the essence of the Heng-Shan School's sword art. Their swordplays were very impressive and the movements were extremely pleasing to the eye. The spectators were watching happily and continuously applauded.

Someone said, "Linghu Chong is the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, it's not unusual the sword art he's using is so brilliant. But this Miss Yue is clearly a disciple of Huashan School. How can she also use Heng-Shan sword art?"

Someone else said, "Linghu Chong is originally Mr. Yue's disciple too, and he was also the eldest disciple. Otherwise, how could he be this proficient in this sword art? If Mr. Yue didn't personally pass it down, how can the two of them fight so harmoniously?"

There was also another one who said, "Mr. Yue is proficient in Huashan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan Schools' sword arts. It seems he must also know the Songshan sword art well. There's no one who fits this position of Five Mountains School's headmaster better than him."

Another person said, "That's not necessarily true. Songshan's Headmaster Zuo's sword art is much higher than Mr. Yue. In the principle of martial art, it's quality over quantity. Even if you know how to use all the martial arts in this world, what's the use? You'll only be a three-legged cat<sup>5</sup>. Headmaster Zuo's single Songshan sword art can defeat Mr. Yue's sword arts from five schools."

The first person from before said, "How do you know? Shamefully blowing your own trumpet."

The second person angrily said, "Blowing my own trumpet? Let's bet fifty taels if you got guts."

The first person replied, "What guts no guts? Let's bet a hundred taels. Trade the silvers first, the loser will be under Heng-Shan School."

The second person answered, "Alright, one hundred taels! What's under Heng-Shan School?"

The first person said, "The loser becomes a nun!" And the second person spat.

At this time, Yue Lingshan's moves became even faster. Linghu Chong saw her looking elegant and graceful. Remembering the old days when they practiced sword together at Mount Huashan, he gradually became absent-minded. When he saw her thrusting with her sword, he just followed it with a move of his own, not realising that this move wasn't actually Heng-Shan School's sword art.

Yue Lingshan was startled and whispered, "Plum Flower like a Bean!" She followed it with a slash at Linghu Chong's forehead.

Linghu Chong was also stupefied and whispered, "Willow Leaf like an Eyebrow!"

Even though the two of them were using Heng-Shan School's sword art, they didn't know the names for them. But these two moves they just exchanged weren't Heng-Shan School's sword arts. These were actually from the sword art they created when they were practising together at Huashan: the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. The 'Chong' was from Linghu Chong's name, and the 'Ling' was from Yue Lingshan's name. This was the sword art they had playfully created together.

Linghu Chong was far more intelligent than his martial sister. In whatever he did, regardless of what it was, he would do it happily without a care for any rules and come up with new and creative ideas. Even though this group of sword art was created by the two of them, almost all of them were

Linghu Chong's ideas. At that time, their martial arts were still shallow that there was nothing formidable about these sword moves. But the two of them had often practised these set of sword arts at a secluded place and were very familiar with this sword art. When Linghu Chong accidentally used the move 'Plum Flower like a Bean', Yue Lingshan followed with the move 'Willow Leaf like an Eyebrow'. The two of them had used these moves without any deep meaning originally, but now, all of a sudden, both of their faces turned red. Linghu Chong didn't slow down as he followed with the move 'See First in the Fog'. Yue Lingshan followed with the move 'First Time after the Rain'. The two of them had practised this set of sword art for so many times during their time at Huashan, but they were afraid that Master and Master-Wife would scold them if they found out, so they didn't tell anyone about it. But at this time, they couldn't control themselves as they used these moves in front of all the realm's heroes. In a short moment, they had traded about ten moves. Not only Linghu Chong felt he had returned to the former scenery at Huashan when they were practising sword together, even Yue Lingshan gradually forgot that she was already married and that she was in front of thousands of Jianghu's people to fight for her father's fame. In her eyes, only her carefree big martial brother was there practising the sword art they had created.

Linghu Chong saw the expression on her face becoming gentler and gentler, and there was a glint of happiness in her eyes. It was obvious she had forgotten the incident of her father slapping her before. He thought, "When I saw her earlier today, she looked melancholy and unhappy. But she's finally feeling happy now. Ai, if only this Chong Ling sword art has thousands of moves and would never finish in a lifetime!" Ever since the time he heard Yue Lingshan humming a Fujian folk song at the Cliff of Contemplation, this was the first time his little martial sister treated him like in the past. His happiness was unbounded.

After another twenty moves, Yue Lingshan's long sword slashed at his left leg and Linghu Chong lifted his left leg to kick at her sword. Yue Lingshan lowered her sword edge to chop at his leg. Linghu Chong's long sword hurriedly attacked her right waist and Yue Lingshan circled her sword. The two swords met with a resounding clang and the points of both swords vibrated. Both of them immediately thrust forward at the same time towards each other's throat. Their speed was unmatched. Looking at both swords thrusting forward at such speed, it seemed no one would be able to go up to save them and they would both meet common ruin. The crowd called out in surprise. But the crowd heard a sudden ringing sound and saw that the points of both swords pushed against each other in mid air, generating sparks and then bent together to make an arch. Both then sent their palms forwards, clashed palms, and floated down separating from each other.

No one could've guessed of this outcome; that the points of these swords could unexpectedly and opportunely meet in mid air like this. It was very hard for two sword points to come together like this just for once even after thousands of sword fights. But these two people had unexpectedly done this once in a lifetime deed. Nobody around there had ever seen such a unique incident of two sword points meeting in the middle of the air in the thousands of sword fights they had seen. But Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan had actually practiced thousands of time to do just this, and they had accomplished what they had set out to do quite some time ago. This move must be done by the two of them simultaneously. When they started their moves, the positioning and power must be completely right. When both sword points met with enough speed behind them, they would bend and make an arch. This sword art was not useful in actually winning a fight against an opponent. But to Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan, this was a very amusing and interesting thing to do though it was very difficult. After

they had finished practising this sword move, they took it a step further and practised till the sword points would hit with sparks flying around. When they had finished practising this move on Huashan, Yue Lingshan asked what name they should call this move by. Linghu Chong answered, "What do you think we should call it?"

Yue Lingshan laughingly answered, "The two swords meeting together simply can't take anyone's life. How about we call it 'Common Ruins'?"

Linghu Chong said, "Common Ruins, it sounded like you and I have absolutely irreconcilable enmity between us. How about we call it 'You Die I Live'!"

Yue Lingshan pouted and said, "Why I die you live? You die I live is the correct one."

Linghu Chong said, "I did say 'You Die I Live'."

"This you and I, it's not clear. No one dies in this move so we should call it 'Live Together Die Together'."

Linghu Chong clapped and said it was a good name. Yue Lingshan thought this name of 'Live Together Die Together' was too intimate, so she dropped her sword and ran.

The crowd saw the two of them were on the verge of death before escaping from an extremely dangerous situation. Cold sweat was running down their hands, and they had even forgotten to cheer. That day in Shaolin temple, when Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong fought, even though Yue Buqun used the moves from Chong Ling sword art to urge him to return to Huashan School, he didn't use this move. Though Yue Buqun secretly peeped into their practice and found out the moves from Chong Ling sword art, he didn't devote his time into practising this nonsense and useless 'Live Together Die Together' move. That was why when Fangzheng, Chongxu, Zuo Lengchan and the other masters saw it, they were all greatly surprised.

Yingying was frightened and felt uneasy after seeing it. She saw they were both smiling as they separated and floated down. From their attitudes and postures, it seemed as

if they were wrapped in a warm and gentle spring breeze. Both of them lifted their swords and fought again. When they created this sword art on Huashan, they were suited to each other and mutually loved each other. For this reason, the sword art they created contained a lot of playful elements and not much killing intention. Now as they fought, they unwittingly returned to their old scenery. Their swords were slow, their eyebrows were lifted, and gradually, the tender feelings from when they were childhood friends bursted forth. This 'sword fight', it would be better to call it 'Dancing with Swords', or better yet, a 'Sword Dance'. This 'Sword Dance', however, was not for entertaining guests but rather for entertaining oneself. Suddenly, from among the crowd, she heard someone uttered a 'Hey!' and sneered coldly. Yue Lingshan was startled when she realised it was her husband's voice. She thought, "It's not right for me to fight big martial brother like this." She circled her sword, slashed upwards, and pierced it forward powerfully. This sword movement looked beautiful as it was a stance out of the Huashan School's 'Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword'. Linghu Chong had also heard Lin Pingzhi's cold sneer and saw how Yue Lingshan promptly changed her move afterwards. The coming attack wasn't soft anymore and didn't look anything like the Chong Ling sword art which was full of tangled up meanings.

His heart felt sour, and all of a sudden, all kinds of past events bubbled up in his minds. He remembered the days when he was being punished by Master on the Cliff of Contemplation to meditate. At that time, little martial sister came every day to deliver him his meals. One day, it snowed heavily and the two of them actually spent a night together inside the cave.

He also thought of the time when little martial sister got sick and the two of them did not meet for many days. The pain of lovesickness blossomed in him then. But at that time, without knowing how, Lin Pingzhi unexpectedly gained her

favour. From then on, the two of them started to misunderstand each other as days go by.

He also thought of the day after little martial sister had learned the 'Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword' from Master-Wife. She came to the cliff to test the moves against him but he was feeling bitter at that time, and he unexpectedly didn't let.... He thought of these things in just a blink of an eye. At this moment, Yue Lingshan's long sword had almost arrived at his chest. As Linghu Chong's mind was in confusion, he flicked out with a finger in his left hand. 'Ring', he flicked at her long sword resulting in Yue Lingshan being unable to hold on to her sword. It flew out of her hand and shot up into the sky.

After Linghu Chong had flicked out the sword, he gloomily called out, "Oops!" He saw Yue Lingshan's expression had turned bitter looking like she wanted to smile, yet unable to smile. That day on the Cliff of Contemplation, Linghu Chong had also used a similar move to flick her treasured sword, the 'Sword of the Green Pool', down the bottomless abyss of a valley. From this incident, a wall had grown between the two of them. He never expected that today he would actually repeat what he did before. For these last few days, on calm nights, he had sometimes pondered on why he flicked away Yue Lingshan's long sword and realised it was because he was jealous of Lin Pingzhi. When his feelings were bubbling forth inside him, it was hard for him to control himself, so he himself was to be blamed. How could he have known that his old jealousy would come out again when he saw how Yue Lingshan's attitude changed on hearing Lin Pingzhi's voice. That day on the Cliff of Contemplation, with a flick, he was already able to shake the long sword off Yue Lingshan's hand. This time, with his current internal energy, he cannot say how far the sword would actually go as it soared high into the sky and actually didn't come down for a little while.



His thought turned quickly, "I actually wanted to lose to little martial sister and make her happy. But I flicked her long sword away now and that's really going to make her lose some face in front of all these heroes. How could I use such a despicable method to repay for little martial sister's friendship?" He took a glance and saw that the long sword was now in mid air and coming down. He immediately shifted his body and called out, "Good Heng-Shan sword art!" He looked as if he had exhausted his energy. In fact he was positioning his body on the point where the sword was coming to. With a 'pu' sound, the long sword entered the back of his left shoulder. Linghu Chong threw himself forward and nailed his long sword on the ground.

This accident happened so fast that the crowd called out and was then stunned into silence. Yue Lingshan was alarmed as she said, "You... Big martial brother..." She saw a bearded man rushed up with his long sword up. The injury on the back of Linghu Chong's shoulder was spouting blood, and more than ten disciples from Heng-Shan School encircled him. Some of them struggled to take their medicines out to apply it on him. Yue Lingshan didn't know whether he would live or die, so she went up to see. With a flash, two swords barred her path. A female nun shouted, "Cruel woman!" Yue Lingshan was startled and retreated a few steps. She didn't know what to do.

Yue Buqun laughed long and hard, then in a clear voice said, "Shan'er, you used the sword arts from Taishan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan Schools to defeat the three headmasters from each respective schools. That's very hard to do!"

Yue Lingshan dropped her long sword. The crowd saw that Linghu Chong had flicked her long sword away, but it was Linghu Chong who was then injured by her long sword. Those were the facts. But whether that move was Heng-Shan's sword art or not, no one could say. When they were fighting using the Chong Ling sword art, the spectators

couldn't understand what they were seeing but they knew the moves were simple and artless, and completely useless. Only the dancing looked good. At the end, it turned into a mishap and everyone was surprised that it would end up like this. Now, when they heard Yue Buqun praising his daughter that she had used the each school's sword art to defeat the three headmasters, they thought this move Yue Lingshan used of sword dropping down from the air was indeed Heng-Shan School's sword art. Although some people had doubts because they felt this sword art was very different from Heng-Shan's sword art and yet they couldn't tell the origin of that sword art. So it was inconvenient to publicly debate this with Yue Buqun.

Yue Lingshan picked up her long sword and saw her sword was covered in blood. Her heart was drumming fiercely and she thought, "How is he? As long as he doesn't die, I'll... I'll..."

# **Chapter 34: Snatching the Leadership**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**



**Zuo Lengchan slowly raised his sword and pointed the sword at Yue Buqun's chest. Yu Buqun crossed his arms in sleeves behind his back and gazed at the sword tip without a blink. Zuo Lengchan's right sleeve started filling up just like a sail starting to gain wind.**

The crowd was commenting on what they had seen when a loud and clear voice said, "Huashan School, under the careful study of Mr. Yue has thoroughly understood the sword arts from Taishan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan Schools. Not only has he understood them, he has actually perfected them and this really makes other people admire him. If Mr. Yue doesn't take up this headmaster position of the Five Mountains School, then there's no one else we can choose." The person who spoke was wearing a ragged and soiled gown. He was the leader of Beggar Clan, Xie Feng. Fangzheng, Chongxu, and he had the same thought that harm would come upon Wulin once Zuo Lengchan merged the five mountains sword schools, and that sooner or later, trouble would come upon the Beggar Clan. He also thought that it was better for the refined gentleman Yue Buqun to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster than the wildly ambitious Zuo Lengchan.

Ever since Beggar Clan existed in Jianghu, they had always been very powerful. Hearing what the Beggar Clan's leader said, the common people didn't dare to rashly object to his words. Suddenly, a deep and cold voice said, "Miss Yue is proficient in Taishan, Hengshan, and Heng-Shan Schools' sword arts. This is really commendable. If you can use Songshan sword art to win against my sword, then the whole Songshan School will accept Mr. Yue as the headmaster." The one who said this was of course Zuo Lengchan. As he talked, he had walked up to the middle of the courtyard with his left hand gripping his sword's scabbard. With a ringing sound, his long sword jumped out of the scabbard, and with a flicker of light, the long sword hovered in mid air. He extended his

right hand and grabbed the sword's handle. This move was extremely pleasing to the eye. With a grip of his left hand, he used his internal energy to force the long sword out. This kind of deep internal energy was rarely seen or heard of. Of course the disciples of Songshan School cheered loudly, and the heroes from the other schools also applauded thunderously.

"I... I'll only use thirteen moves. If within these thirteen moves I can't win against martial uncle Zuo..." Yue Lingshan replied.

Zuo Lengchan angrily thought, "You little girl dare to openly receive my swordplay? How daring! You even put a limit of thirteen moves. So you regard me as if I'm nothing." He then coldly said, "If you can't best me within thirteen moves, then what?"

"How... How can I be martial uncle Zuo's match? I've only learned thirteen moves of Songshan School's sword art from my father. Martial uncle Zuo can verify this with your own hand."

Zuo Lengchan snorted.

Yue Lingshan continued, "My father said that even though these thirteen moves are Songshan School's brilliant sword art, when I use them, he's afraid that in just one move my sword would be shaken out of my hands by martial uncle Zuo, and it'll be impossible for me to even get to the second move."

Zuo Lengchan again snorted and didn't express his opinion. When Yue Lingshan first started talking, her voice was trembling. Whether it was because her strength was depleted or because she was facing such a big hero in Wulin and became afraid, no one knew. But as she continued talking, her voice gradually calmed. She went on, "I said to Dad: 'Martial uncle Zuo is without question Songshan School's number one master, but he's not necessarily the number one master in our five mountains sword schools. His martial art is high, but he may not necessarily be proficient

in all the five mountains sword schools sword arts like you, Dad.' My dad then said: 'This word proficient, it's easier said than done. All I know is some basic skills only. If you don't believe me, you can fight against martial uncle Zuo once you've learned this kind of three-legged cat skills of Songshan School sword art. If you can fight against martial uncle Zuo's earth-shattering Songshan sword art for more than three moves, then I'll praise you as my good daughter.'"

Zuo Lengchan laughed coldly and said, "If you defeat me within three moves, then you'll become an even better daughter for Mr. Yue."

"Martial uncle Zuo's sword art is godly, and talent such as yours has rarely been seen in hundreds of years at the Songshan School. I had only learned a few moves of the Songshan sword art from my father and I just did that recently. How can I dare to think such wild thoughts? Father told me to receive three moves from martial uncle Zuo; but I am foolishly deluded to hope I can receive thirteen moves of martial uncle Zuo's Songshan sword art. However I don't know whether I can fulfil my wish or not."

Zuo Lengchan thought, "Don't say thirteen moves, if I let you go beyond three moves, then I already have no face to show anymore." He lifted his left hand and extended his thumb, forefinger, and middle finger to grab the point of his sword. Holding the sword point, he then suddenly let go of the long sword from his right hand and like a string plucked, the sword handle shot forward and swayed. "Make your move!"

With this stunt, Zuo Lengchan created a sensation throughout the crowd. Not only was he using his unfavoured left hand to use the sword, but he was also holding the sword by gripping the sword point with three fingers while the sword handle faced the opponent. Compared to fighting a naked blade with bare hands, fighting with a sword gripped at sword point by three fingers was ten times more difficult. Receiving a slight shake to the sword might slash his fingers,

and if this happened, how would he still be able to hold onto the sword and use it?

It was obvious that Zuo Lengchan was greatly indignant and was showing complete disdain towards Yue Lingshan by using such method. In addition, he deliberately shocked everyone with this marvellous skill. Seeing him holding his sword this way, Yue Lingshan trembled. She thought, "What kind of martial art is he using? Daddy didn't teach me anything like this." And fear started to grow in her heart. She also thought, "Since it has come to this, what's the use of being afraid?" With this last thought, she quickly glanced towards the crowd of Heng-Shan School's disciples. She saw they were still in a circle but she didn't hear any crying. She guessed that although Linghu Chong's injury was serious, his life wasn't threatened.

She raised her long sword above her head and bowed. This was the move called 'The Whole School Facing the Ancestors', which was an original sword art from Songshan. The meaning of this sword move was to show respect. Songshan's disciples burst into cheers feeling quite pleased. Whenever Songshan's disciples were about to trade moves with the school's seniors, they must use this move first. The meaning was they wouldn't dare to fight with the senior but were instead asking for some pointers from the senior. Zuo Lengchan nodded slightly and thought, "How unexpected that you can use this move! Finally you're being clever in showing me this move. I won't let you be too shamed then."

After Yue Lingshan had finished using the move 'The Whole School Facing the Ancestors', with a flash, her long sword changed into a white rainbow as it thrust towards Zuo Lengchan. This move looked really grand, and it was precisely the essence of Songshan School's sword art. Even though Zuo Lengchan was well educated in the Songshan School's sword art of 'Inside Eight Groups, Outside Nine Groups', and in these seventeen groups, he knew very well the length and speed of each sword art group, he had never



seen this move before. He was greatly startled and thought, "What move is this? From my Songshan School's seventeen sword art groups, it seemed none of them is higher in level than this move. This is strange." Not only was he a great master in Songshan, he was also a great scholar of martial study of this generation. So once he saw his own school's grand and mysterious sword move, he wanted to see it clearly. He saw Yue Lingshan's attack was coming, but her internal energy wasn't powerful, so once her sword came to a few inches from his body, he could just shook it out of her hand. But if he did that, he wouldn't be able to see whether there were more strange changes in the moves after this one.

As soon as Yue Lingshan's attack came to a foot of his chest, she withdrew her sword, slanted her body, circled her long sword, and slashed down towards his left shoulder. This move looked like Songshan School's sword art called 'Wise Man Throughout the Ages', but 'Wise Man Throughout the Ages' was faster even though it was not as grand. It also looked like the move 'Floating Kingfisher', but lighter and not as grand as 'Floating Kingfisher'; It also looked a little bit like 'Jade Well, Heaven Pond', but 'Jade Well, Heaven Pond' looked more impressive and dignified. When this move was used by Yue Lingshan, it had an air of elegance about it.

Zuo Lengchan had keen eyesight and he had immersed himself in the study of Songshan School's sword art for his whole life. The fineness and the advantages of every move and every stance, the smallest details of every complicated point, were all engraved in his mind. Now that he suddenly saw how Yue Lingshan's move contained the strong points of the many big moves of the Songshan School's sword art, while looking like it covered the weak points of those swordplays, he couldn't help feeling excited, amazed, and happy, just as if he had seen a treasure falling down from the sky.

Years ago on Mount Huashan, the five mountains sword schools fought twice with ten elders from the Devil Sect and

lost quite a number of masters. Many unique skills from the five schools' sword arts also died together with these masters. Later, Zuo Lengchan had gathered all the surviving elders from the Songshan School and recorded the sword moves from their memories irrespective of their fineness and completed a sword manual. In the last dozens of years, at Wucunjing, he had altered and improved moves which weren't fierce or grand enough to make the seventeen groups of sword moves perfect. Even though he didn't create any new swordplay, he had rendered a great service by his arrangement of the Songshan sword arts.

Now, seeing that Yue Lingshan had used Songshan sword art that was not from the school's sword manual and that seemed deeper compared to all the currently existing stances and moves of Songshan sword art, he couldn't help being joyful and sighing in praise. If this sword art was being executed by a strong opponent like Ren Woxing or Linghu Chong, or even Great Master Fangzheng or Priest Chongxu, Zuo Lengchan would have to concentrate completely on fighting his opponent. Even if his opponent's sword moves were wonderful, he would have to cope with it with all of his power that he would not have the leisure to look at the opponent's sword art. On the other hand, Yue Lingshan's shallow internal energy was nothing to be afraid of. In the event of a desperate situation, he could just shake the long sword out of her hand at any time and fight for real. For now, he continued observing the changes in her sword moves intently.

The crowd saw Yue Lingshan's long sword dancing about, each move a foot away from her opponent, looking like she was deliberately giving way and looking as if she was afraid. Zuo Lengchan, though, just stood still while his face sometimes registered happiness and sometimes worry as if he had lost his mind. This kind of martial art fighting had never been seen before. The crowd looked at each other amazed. Only the disciples of the Songshan School were

observing the fight intently fearing they would miss seeing half a stance.

Yue Lingshan has learned these few moves of Songshan sword art from the engravings on the cave wall on the Cliff of Contemplation. Altogether, there were around sixty to seventy moves engraved on the cave wall. After Yue Buqun had studied them, he guessed that around forty of them were most likely already known and used by Zuo Lengchan while the rest looked brilliant but seemed insufficient to move Zuo Lengchan's heart. Only these thirteen moves were certain to awe him and make him want to see them no matter what. The stances engraved on the cave wall were definitely dead without possible variations and Yue Lingshan only used them according to the movements engraved on the wall. But when Zuo Lengchan saw them, he could imagine how all the moves could be used together, and as he thought more, the ways to use these moves seemed endless.

Yue Lingshan capably used up all thirteen moves and started from the beginning again for the fourteenth move. Zuo Lengchan thought, "Should I take a look again, or do I shake her long sword off?" These two matters were very easy for him to do. If he wanted to continue watching, even if the level of Yue Lingshan's swordplay were higher, she still wouldn't be able to hurt him. If he wanted to shake her long sword off then all he had to do was lift his hand to do it. But to choose between the two choices was not easy at all. All of a sudden, many things popped up in his head, "After this, I'm afraid there'd be no more chance to see these wonderful Songshan sword arts again. To kill this little girl is easy but where can I see these sword arts again? How can I ask Mr. Yue for a demonstration? If I let her continue, it'll seem as if I can't contend with this little girl from Huashan. How can I keep my face after that? Aiyo, she's done more than thirteen moves!" As he thought of the words 'thirteen moves', the thought of becoming the leader of Wulin overpowered the idea of studying these martial arts. He flicked the three

fingers on his left hand and his sword shot up and hit Yue Lingshan's long sword generating a continuously cracking sound. Afterwards, Yue Lingshan was left only with a sword handle and an inch of her sword blade, while dozens of broken pieces lay on the ground.

Yue Lingshan jumped back and retreated for dozens of feet, then in a loud voice said, "Martial uncle Zuo, how many Songshan sword art moves did I use?"

Zuo Lengchan closed both of his eyes thinking about those sword moves Yue Lingshan used. He recalled each move one by one, then opened his eyes and said, "You used thirteen moves! Very good, it's not easy."

Yue Lingshan bowed and cupped her fist. "Martial uncle Zuo, thank you for your mercy in letting me show off my meagre skills in using thirteen sword moves of the Songshan sword art in front of you."

The crowd sighed in admiration at the divine martial art Zuo Lengchan used to break Yue Lingshan's long sword. But Yue Lingshan had declared before that she was going to use thirteen moves of Songshan sword art in front of Zuo Lengchan. The majority of the crowd thought it wouldn't be an easy thing even to manage using three moves, let alone thirteen moves. But unexpectedly Zuo Lengchan had acted like a crazy person and let her execute up to the fourteenth move before striking out. Everyone was surprised, and there were people who thought wildly and believed Zuo Lengchan was a pervert because his mind seemed to have gone blank in front of such a beautiful young woman as an opponent.

From the Songshan School's cluster, a thin old person walked out. He was 'Crane Hands' Lu Bai and he said in a clear voice, "Headmaster Zuo's divine martial art is unrivalled. Everyone can see how elegant and open minded he is. How absurd of this Miss Yue to show off some basic skills of my Songshan School's sword arts in front of him! Headmaster Zuo merely waited for her to exhaust her skills before subduing her. In the martial art study, it's quality over

quantity, so no matter which sect's or which school's martial art you're using, you must practise them until you reach the pinnacle of that martial art and only then can you stand in Wulin..." He only said till here when the crowd started nodding their heads. These words had touched directly at the thoughts of each person there. These men of Jianghu, besides a few masters there, had actually only learned the martial art of one school. So when Lu Bai said it was quality over quantity in the study of martial art, they all approved of it. But whether these people actually had 'quality' enough in their own martial art, it was very difficult to say. On the other hand, it could certainly be said that these people did not know a large 'quantity' of martial arts.

Lu Bai went on, "This Miss Yue is quite smart. When other schools were practising their swordplay, she secretly peeped in and stole some sword moves, then praised herself to be proficient in the five mountains sword schools' sword arts. Actually, each school's martial art has its own secret that's passed down personally by the masters. If you only peeped into the moves of each stance, then how can you say that you're 'proficient' in them?" The crowd again nodded their heads, and they all thought, "Stealing other schools' martial art is Wulin's biggest taboo. The consequence of this will definitely fall on Yue Buqun's head."

That old person continued, "How can you praise yourself to be proficient in other school's martial art if all you did was peeked at other people's wonderful stances and learned it yourself? Did you teach yourself that school's martial art secret? If not, then how can that be a highly wonderful move? I steal yours, you steal mine, wouldn't that be chaotic?" Right after he finished saying this, many people in the crowd burst into laughter.

Yue Lingshan had used Hengshan sword art to defeat Mr. Mo Da and used Heng-Shan sword art to defeat Linghu Chong. However, in both fights, it looked as if they had given way to her. But when she used Taishan sword art to defeat

Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi, she truly used real skills. She was actually proficient in the sword moves she used to fight Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi, and yet because she had attacked them when they were unprepared, it could still be said that she used her fine sword art in an opportunistic way to gain triumph. Even though she only pretended to know the move 'Daizong Way', besides the masters of Taishan School, no one else knew of the sham. However, the crowd wasn't willing to acknowledge that outsiders could be proficient in the martial art of another school. So when they heard what Lu Bai said, many people added their voice to the commotion created by the Songshan School's disciples. When Lu Bai saw his speech had gained the acknowledgement of the crowd, he looked pleased with himself, and raised his voice to say, "So, for this position of headmaster of the Five Mountains School, there's no one better than Headmaster Zuo to occupy it. Also it should be known, to learn one type of martial art to its pinnacle is much better than learning a lot of martial art shallowly." When he said these words, they were clearly pointed at Yue Buqun. Dozens of young disciples of Songshan School cheered loudly at this. Lu Bai said, "Within the five mountains sword schools, if there's anyone who's confident of defeating Headmaster Zuo, then please come out and show us your skill." He turned around but no one came up.

Originally, the Peach Valley Six Fairies would surely have come out to talk nonsense. But at this time, Yingying was worried about helping Linghu Chong, so she didn't have time to direct the Peach Valley Six Fairies in making trouble for the Songshan School. Peachtree Root Fairy and his five brothers were looking at each other, but they couldn't come up with an idea on what was best to do. 'Tower Holding Palm' Ding Mian shouted loudly, "Since no one wants to challenge Headmaster Zuo, Headmaster Zuo is favoured by everyone here. Then we'll ask him to be our Five Mountains School's headmaster."

Zuo Lengchan feigned humility and said, "There's an abundance of talented people in the Five Mountains School, I have no virtue and no ability, I don't deserve to take up this heavy responsibility."

Songshan School's seventh protector Tang Yingge said clearly, "The position of headmaster of the Five Mountains School is a high position and has heavy responsibility, but we have to push Headmaster Zuo into taking this difficult job so that the thousands of Five Mountains School's disciples have good fortune, and we can contribute greatly to the orthodox path in Jianghu. Headmaster Zuo, please become our leader!"

Suddenly, gongs and drums reverberated loudly, while firecrackers went off in succession. All these had been prepared beforehand by the Songshan School's disciples. As the thunderous sound of firecrackers erupted, Songshan School's disciples along with the invited friends of Zuo Lengchan cried out, "Headmaster Zuo, please ascend the throne! Headmaster Zuo, please ascend the throne!"

Zuo Lengchan leapt up and landed lightly on top of the place of worship. Just then, it was already dusk and the sun was about to go down the mountain. As the setting sun shone slantingly on Zuo Lengchan, the apricot yellow gown he was wearing glittered like gold and added to the grand atmosphere. He cupped his fist and turned his body around to greet the crowd below the place of worship. "Since everyone is pushing me into it, if I don't agree to take on this difficult responsibility, it would seem like I was protecting my own reputation and was not willing to make a contribution to the orthodox path in Wulin." Several hundred people from the Songshan School thunderously cheered and applauded.

Suddenly, a female voice interrupted, "Martial Uncle Zuo, you broke my long sword. But just by breaking my sword, how can you become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School?" The one who said this was Yue Lingshan.

"All the realm's heroes are here. Everyone said before that it was a sword competition to take the leadership. If Miss Yue can break the long sword in my hand like that, then everyone will accept Miss Yue to be the Five Mountains School's headmaster," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Of course I can't win over Martial Uncle Zuo. But within our Five Mountains School, it's not necessarily true that there's no one whose martial art is better than Martial Uncle Zuo," Yue Lingshan replied.

From among the people in the Five Mountains School, Linghu Chong was the only one Zuo Lengchan was afraid of. Ever since Linghu Chong had gotten heavily injured after fighting against Yue Lingshan, Zuo Lengchan had felt relieved and confident. Now hearing Yue Lingshan's reply, he retorted, "So according to Miss Yue's opinion, within the Five Mountains, there's someone whose martial art can defeat me? Is this person your father, your mother, or your husband?" Songshan School's disciples exploded in laughter.

"My husband is of a lower generation, so he must yield to Martial Uncle Zuo if he were to fight. My mother's sword art is well-matched with martial uncle Zuo's. While my father, I think his skills are slightly higher than Martial Uncle Zuo's," Yue Lingshan said.

Songshan School's disciples jeered at this. Some whistled loudly while some stomped their feet on the ground.

Zuo Lengchan said to Yue Buqun, "Mr. Yue, your daughter regards your martial art really highly."

"My little daughter can't stop her mouth blabbering. Brother Zuo doesn't have to treat her seriously. My swordplay is nothing when compared to Shaolin School's Great Master Fangzheng, Wudang School's Priest Chongxu, and Beggar Clan's Leader Xie," Yue Buqun replied.

Zuo Lengchan's face changed colour when he heard this. Yue Buqun had mentioned three names but his name was not one of them. Clearly, Yue Buqun was praising himself to be better than Zuo Lengchan in front of everyone.



Ding Mian said, "How about compared to Headmaster Zuo?"

Yue Buqun replied, "Brother Zuo and I have known each other for many years and we respect each other. Both Songshan and Huashan Schools' sword arts are strong, and in the last hundreds of years there has been no distinction on which one is higher. So it's very hard for me to answer Brother Ding's question."

"Judging from Mr. Yue's tone, it sounded like you believe yourself to be stronger than Headmaster Zuo?" Ding Mian said.

"The master said: 'A gentleman has nothing to fight about but if it must be, he will fight'. Since ancient times, it's unavoidable to dispute over how high someone's martial art is. I've long harboured a wish to ask Martial Brother Zuo for pointers. But today is our new Five Mountains School's inauguration, and we haven't selected a headmaster yet. If Brother Zuo and I have a sword fight, then it'll look as if we're having a fight for the position of the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Then it'll be unavoidable for people to gossip," Yue Buqun said.

Zuo Lengchan said, "If Brother Yue can win against this sword in my hand, then Brother Yue will be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School."

Yue Buqun waved his hand a few times and said, "It's not necessarily true that a person with high martial arts will also have high moral behaviour. If I manage to win against Brother Zuo, it'll not necessarily be true that I'd be able to win against the rest of the masters in the Five Mountains School." The way he said these words was very modest, but each meticulously said word proclaimed that he was a level better than Zuo Lengchan. Zuo Lengchan got angrier the longer he listened. He coldly said, "Brother Yue's reputation as 'Gentleman Sword' shakes the whole world. The word 'Gentleman' is well known to everyone. But this word 'Sword', we've heard of it a lot, but have rarely seen it. Today,

as the entire world's heroes have gathered here, I'll have to ask Brother Yue to show your brilliant sword art so as to let everyone here open their eyes!"

Many people called out, "Go up and fight, go up and fight!" "All talk and no action, what kind of hero is that?" "Go and have a sword fight, decide which one is stronger, what's the use of boasting?"

Yue Buqun put both of his hands behind his back and stayed silent. His expression was solemn and respectful, and there was a hint of worry in his face. When Zuo Lengchan was planning to merge the five mountains sword schools, he had already known the martial arts of each master from the other four schools, and was confident that no one from those four schools would be able to win against him. So he did his utmost to push this merger through. Otherwise if there was someone with a more powerful martial art than him, then after the merger of the five mountains sword schools, this position of headmaster might be snatched by other people. If that happened, wouldn't that be benefiting other people instead? Yue Buqun's swordplay was brilliant and his attainment of the 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' was also not low; both of these things were well known to Zuo Lengchan.

Thus, Zuo Lengchan incited Feng Buping, Cheng Buyou, and other masters from the Sword Branch to go up Mount Huashan, and he also sent more than ten other good fighters from other schools to attack Yue Buqun at the God of Medicine Monastery. Although they failed, they managed to gather in detail the level of Yue Buqun's martial art. After Zuo Lengchan personally saw Yue Buqun fighting against Linghu Chong at the Shaolin temple, he became even more at ease. Even though Yue Buqun's sword art was wonderful, he was still not Zuo Lengchan's match. When Yue Buqun kicked Linghu Chong, he even got his right leg broken. That showed his internal energy cultivation was just mediocre. But as for this little kid Linghu Chong, he seemed to have suddenly advanced greatly in his sword art, which was really beyond

his expectation. But he couldn't always be afraid of this loafer, and just give up this big matter that he had been planning for tens of years already. Moreover, Linghu Chong's strong point was only in his swordplay, while his barehand martial art was very ordinary. If they were to fight for real and he couldn't win by his swordplay, then he would use his fist and palm at the same time and he could immediately take Linghu Chong's life then. However, all his anxiety left him completely when he saw Linghu Chong had gotten himself willingly injured under Yue Lingshan's sword.

Now, hearing the Yue father and daughter speaking so boastfully, he thought, "I don't know how you did it, but you've studied the lost unique skills of the five mountains sword schools, and now got yourself deluded over this. If you, Yue Buqun, were fighting me, and suddenly use these moves, you would've intimidated me. But it was the wrong move to let your daughter use them first. Now I'm already prepared for these moves, so what's the use of using them again?" He also thought, "This person is very calculating and careful, if I can beat him up good and proper in front of all the heroes here then he won't be cocky anymore. Otherwise, he'll remain in my Five Mountains School and be a big trouble the future." So he said, "Brother Yue, all the world heroes have already asked you to go up and show your skill, how can you not give them face?"

"Since Brother Zuo said it, I'll have to respectfully obey your order," Yue Buqun replied, and then step by step he walked up the place of worship.

Thinking there was a good show to be seen, the crowd cheered happily.

Yue Buqun folded his hands in salute and said, "Brother Zuo, we're now under the same school. So we'll just stop at skin-deep when comparing our skills. What do you think?"

"Brother, you must definitely be careful. I'll do my best not injure Brother Yue," Zuo Lengchan replied.

The people from the Songshan School called out, "You haven't fought yet but you are already asking for mercy! It's better not to fight then." "The blade isn't born with eyes. Once it moves, who can guarantee you won't be harmed or killed?" "If you're afraid, then be clever and accept defeat and descend from the fight courtyard. It's not too late."

Yue Buqun smiled and said clearly, "The blade isn't born with eyes. Once it moves, it's difficult to avoid death or injuries. These words are right." He then turned his head toward Huashan School's disciples and said, "Disciples of Huashan, listen to me: Martial Brother Zuo and I are going to compare skills. There's no enmity in this. If Martial Brother Zuo slips and kills me, or heavily injures me, that's just because the battle is too fierce and it's not easy to stop an inch away. No one must hate Martial Uncle Zuo for this, and you must also not seek revenge on the people from Songshan School, so that you don't ruin the loyalty within our Five Mountains School." Yue Lingshan and everyone else acknowledged him loudly. Zuo Lengchan didn't expect him to talk like this so he said, "Brother Yue understands about righteousness very deeply. The loyalty within our school is most important. That's very good."

Yue Buqun smiled and said, "The merger of our five schools into one was the most difficult thing to do. If the peace of the Five Mountains School is harmed because of the two of us comparing our sword techniques and inner fighting between martial brothers in the Five Mountains School occurred, then that'll be counter to the original meaning of merging the schools."

"Right!" Zuo Lengchan agreed, while he thought, "This person is very timid. I should take advantage of this and subdue him now." When masters fight, internal strength and movements were very important, but winning and losing was often decided by the strength of will. Zuo Lengchan secretly felt happy that Yue Buqun was showing a weakness. With a ringing sound, he drew his long sword out. When the long

sword cleared the scabbard, the sound unexpectedly reverberated throughout the whole valley. Zuo Lengchan had moved his inner energy in a unique way so that the edge of the sword struck the inner wall of the sheath continuously as it comes out of its sheath and emitted a thunderous ringing sound. The people who didn't know the reason for this were astonished greatly. The people from Songshan School again cheered loudly.

On the other hand, Yue Buqun pulled out his long sword along with its scabbard from his waist. Then he freed the sword from its sheath, and slowly and silently pulled it out. Judging from the way these two people pulled their swords out, it could be said that this sword fight was between a master and a novice. It looked as if the outcome was already certain that there was no need for a fight.

Linghu Chong's shoulder blade was pierced by the long sword which penetrated all the way to the front and as a result, he suffered a really heavy injury. After witnessing Linghu Chong getting injured, Yingying became really worried and without caring about her disguise, she rushed forward with her long sword raised to protect him. Once the Heng-Shan School's disciples had surrounded him, Yihe took out the 'White Cloud Bear Gallbladder' pill and nervously spilled out five to six pills and put them in Linghu Chong's mouth. Yingying had already sealed the acupoints on his chest and on his back to stop the bleeding quite some time ago. Yiqing and Zheng E separately applied the 'Heavenly Connecting Glue' on his wound. When it was their headmaster who was injured, how could the disciples be stingy in using the medicine? They weren't afraid to apply ample amounts of medicine. In fact, they regarded this priceless medicine like it was just mud as they applied it thickly on his wound. Even though Linghu Chong's injury was serious, he was still clear-headed. When he saw how Yingying and the Heng-Shan School's disciples were deeply concerned for him, he felt apologetic, "Just because I wanted to make

little martial sister smile, I made Yingying and martial sisters from Heng-Shan School worried to death." He immediately smiled and said, "I don't know how, I got careless and got... got injured. Don't... don't worry. No need... no need..."

"Don't say anything," Yingying rebuked. Even though she tried her best to sound coarse, it was still very hard to cover up her feminine voice. All the disciples of the Heng-Shan School were stunned to hear this bearded man having a tender and soft voice.

Linghu Chong said, "Let me... have a look... have a look..."

"Yes," Yiqing answered, and pulled her two martial sisters who were in front of his body to the side to let him watch Yue Lingshan's fight with Zuo Lengchan. Linghu Chong saw Yue Lingshan using Songshan sword art; Zuo Lengchan breaking her sword, and finally Zuo Lengchan and Yue Buqun facing each other for a fight on top of the place of worship place. All these he observed vaguely.

With his long sword pointed to the ground, Yue Buqun turned around to face Zuo Lengchan with a smile on his face. At this time, they were around twenty feet away from each other. The crowd was holding their breath and the whole Songshan mountaintop was deathly quiet. But Linghu Chong heard a really faint voice reciting a scripture, "If fierce beasts surrounded you and you were frightened by their sharp teeth and claws, you could call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name, and all the beasts would quickly leave. When you see venomous serpents and scorpions, you can call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name and praise her holy power, then they will go back to their lairs. When lightening and thunders strike the ground and hail and heavy rain start pouring down, one can call Bodhisattva Guanyin's name and praise her holy power so that the bad weather would stop and disappear. For all living creatures, there are so many difficulties, but the holy and wonderful power from Bodhisattva Guanyin will help us get through all of them...." The voice reading this scripture was

very sincere and earnest. Linghu Chong knew straight away that it was Yilin who was praying to Guanyin for his well being. Many days ago, in the outskirts of Hengshan city, Yilin had once read this scripture to him. This time he didn't turn his head around to have a look, but he remembered clearly how Yilin looked like on that day long ago when her eyes were full of love and her beautiful face looked soft and warm. A soft and warm feeling bubbled up inside his heart, "Not only Yingying, Martial Sister Yilin also regards me more important than their own lives. Even if my body were grounded to dust and all my bones were broken, it'd still be hard for me to repay their kindness."

Zuo Lengchan saw Yue Buqun's sword was across his chest while his left hand was in a sword-form poised for writing letters. Zuo Lengchan knew this move was a Huashan sword art called 'Poetry Sword to Meet Friends'. It was the stance Huashan School used when having a friendly fight against people from the orthodox path. The meaning behind this move was when cultured men make friends, they combine sentences together to make poems, while when martial men make friends, they compare martial skills. When this move was used, it made it clear that there was no enmity between the opponents. So the sword fight should only decide the winner and loser, and mustn't take each other's lives. There was a smile on the corner of Zuo Lengchan's mouth as he said, "No need to be polite," while he thought, "Yue Buqun is praised as a gentleman, but I see he's more of a hypocrite. It's not necessarily because of his good heart that he's not showing any kind of hostility towards me. One, he might be afraid. Second, he's trying to make me bold and careless so that he can try to catch me off guard and kill me." Zuo Lengchan pointed his left hand out to the side while his right hand aimed the long sword forward. This move was Songshan School's sword art called 'Opening the Gate to See the Mountain'. He used this sword move to say, if you want to fight then fight, there's no need to be putting on air, and it

also implied that his opponent was a hypocrite. Yue Buqun let out a sigh and thrust his long sword forward with the point of the sword continuously trembling. When the sword reached midway, it suddenly turned around and shot up changing into the Huashan sword art 'Concealed Green Mountain'. The sword point was vague, like it was there and wasn't there, as it fluctuated endlessly.

Zuo Lengchan slashed down powerfully in an earth-shaking imposing manner. Many of the spectators gasped and cried out. Originally, this move didn't exist as part of the Songshan sword art. But Zuo Lengchan borrowed a stance from the barehanded martial art, and used his sword like it was his fist. This move 'Split Huashan Open' was very ordinary and was thoroughly understood by everyone who had ever studied barehanded martial art before. The five mountains sword schools had been communicating with each other for several hundred years already. So not only Songshan sword art didn't have this move, even if it existed, with Huashan School's name in its name, they probably wouldn't have used it or maybe they would've changed its form. At this time, Zuo Lengchan had intentionally changed this existing barehanded martial art into a sword move to infuriate Yue Buqun. Songshan sword art always looked grand and when he used this ordinary move 'Split Huashan Open', it still looked like it could split mountain and still unleash the power of Songshan sword art. Yue Buqun leaned to a side to dodge it while thrusting his sword slantingly using the move 'Forest of Ancient Pine'. Zuo Lengchan saw his movement was tight and cautious, like it wasn't seeking for a result but to avoid making a mistake and it was precisely the method to use when having a long fight. It was obvious Yue Buqun wasn't feeling angry from the two movements 'Opening the Gate to See the Mountain' and 'Split Huashan Open' that Zuo Lengchan used. Zuo Lengchan appraised his opponent was a strong enemy and if he kept on fighting him contemptuously, randomly using new moves,



then he would've given him too much advantage. So he immediately slashed his long sword from left to right using Songshan School's real sword art 'Jade Dragon Outside of Heaven'.

Songshan's disciples had all learned this move, but who could have used it in such a surging and grand manner? As Zuo Lengchan's long sword traversed through the air, it looked bent and straight, like it was something alive, and the disciples all cheered loudly. From the moment the heroes of the other schools arrived at Mount Songshan, they had been watching the Songshan School's people beating drums, releasing firecrackers, and applauding Zuo Lengchan no matter what he said. So everyone in the crowd felt at least some loathing in their heart. But this time, when they heard Songshan disciples cheering loudly, they felt that it was reasonable, so they also cheered. This move of 'Jade Dragon Outside of Heaven' executed by Zuo Lengchan looked as if a spirit snake or a divine dragon came to life. Regardless of whether they used sword or other weapons, the people in the crowd all sighed in praise. When the old masters of Taishan and Hengshan School saw this move, they all couldn't help rejoicing, "Lucky the one he's fighting up there is Yue Buqun, and not me!"

Zuo Lengchan and Yue Buqun were using their own school's sword art to fight each other. Songshan's sword behaved more like a halberd; its qi was very thick akin to a thousand soldiers and ten thousands horses rushing forth, scattering yellow dust from thousands of li away. Huashan's sword was light and lively, like a pair of swallows flying amongst the willow during the spring time, going high and low, left and right, and flying around. In that moment, even though Yue Buqun didn't look like he was going to lose, the Songshan sword qi from the sword art's mostly offensive moves was slashing everywhere on top of the place of worship that Yue Buqun tried not to clash his long sword with his opponent's sword the entire time. It was evident that

even though his sword art was wonderful, it was only relying on 'agility' and therefore not a match for the powerful Songshan sword art.

It seemed the two of them were masters of the martial study, so as they competed swords, there was no fixed path or structure that they followed. Zuo Lengchan used the seventeen sword paths of the Songshan sword art all mixed together. Yue Buqun used fewer sword stances but Huashan sword art had many complicated variations and the moves also came out one after another effortlessly. After trading more than twenty moves, Zuo Lengchan suddenly lifted the long sword in his right hand while his left palm fiercely struck out. This palm enveloped thirty six fatal acupoints on his opponent's upper body, and if Yue Buqun were to dodge it, he would immediately be pierced by the sword. But Yue Buqun's face turned purple as he gathered his qi and shot his left palm out to clash palms with Zuo Lengchan. With a thunderous sound, the two palms clashed. Yue Buqun flew back, but Zuo Lengchan just stood there motionless.

Yue Buqun called out, "Is that palm move Songshan's martial art?"

Linghu Chong was deeply concerned when he saw the two of them had clashed palms. He knew Zuo Lengchan's Polar Ice Energy was very formidable. Even Ren Woxing with his deep and abundant internal energy was in a very dangerous situation after being hit by it, and it unexpectedly made the four of them into snowmen. Even though Yue Buqun had been cultivating his qi for a long time, it still wasn't as good as Ren Woxing. So if they were to clash palms a few more times, even if he didn't turn into a frozen corpse, it was certain that he wouldn't be able to endure it.

Zuo Lengchan smilingly said, "This is the palm move I created. I'll pick a disciple from the Five Mountains School and impart this skill to him in the future."

"I have to ask Brother Zuo for some pointers then," Yue Buqun replied.

"Very good," Zuo Lengchan replied while he thought, "His Huashan School's 'Divine Art of Violet Twilight' is also very good. After he received my 'Polar Ice Energy Palm', he could speak without quivering."

Zuo Lengchan immediately wielded his long sword and thrust it towards Yue Buqun. Yue Buqun counterattacked with his sword. After many moves, a crashing sound was heard as they again clashed palms. Yue Buqun's long sword circled and slashed out at Zuo Lengchan's waist. Zuo Lengchan blocked it with a vertical sword move, moved his qi into his left palm and struck out at the back of Yue Buqun's body. This downwards palm strike had a powerful force and was wonderfully positioned. Yue Buqun turned his left palm around and with a light clapping sound, they clashed palms for the third time. Yue Buqun lowered his body to fly out. But Zuo Lengchan felt an aching pain in the middle of his left palm. He lifted his palm to have a look and saw there was a small hole there with black blood seeping out. Half startled and half angry, he scolded, "Crafty thief, shameless!"

He was thinking Yue Buqun must have concealed a poisonous needle in his palm and this had pierced the middle of his palm when they suddenly clashed. The blood seeping out of his palm had already turned black from poison. He never thought this person with the nickname 'Gentleman Sword' would actually have such a contemptible conduct. He inhaled a breath of air, and tapped three acupoints on his left shoulder with his right finger to stop the poison from going up. He thought, "Such a trivial poison needle, how can it stop me? But I must fight him quickly and mustn't let him drag it along." He promptly attacked with his sword like a blast of rain. Yue Buqun wielded his sword to counter attack, his sword moves had also changed into very violent moves. At this time, the evening had just set in, and the fight between these two people on the place of worship couldn't be seen that clearly anymore. But it was still easy to see by everyone gathered around the place of worship that the fight had

turned deadly. Great Master Fangzheng said, "Mercy, mercy! Why did you suddenly turn so violent?"

After more than ten moves, Zuo Lengchan felt the poison on his palm spreading up while his opponent's defence remained very tight so he kept on increasing the force of his sword. Yue Buqun was finding it hard to keep up and seemed like he was unable to keep blocking anymore. Suddenly, Yue Buqun changed his swordplay. Now, his sword was suddenly extending and withdrawing, and the stances looked really strange and weird. The crowd below the place of worship was surprised and one by one whispered to each other, "What sword art is this?" The people being asked were asking back, and every one was just shaking their heads without being able to summon up an answer.

Linghu Chong had been leaning on Yingying. When he suddenly saw his master's swordplay becoming both fast and weird, and very different from the sword art of Huashan School, he was surprised. Then he glanced around and saw that Zuo Lengchan's swordplay had also changed. Now, Zuo Lengchan was using sword moves which were unexpectedly very similar to the ones his master were using. The two of them were attacking and defending very quickly, and the swordplay coordination between the two of them was seamless, as if they were martial brothers who had been practising this set of sword arts together for dozens of years already. In the next twenty moves, Zuo Lengchan kept on advancing with each of his move while Yue Buqun continuously retreated.

Linghu Chong was very good at looking at flaws in other people's martial art. So he was getting really anxious when he saw the flaws in his master's swordplay getting bigger and bigger while the situation was getting more and more dangerous. Seeing that Zuo Lengchan's win was guaranteed, Songshan School's disciples cried out in joy. Zuo Lengchan's attacks were swift and continuous.

When he saw his opponent's swordplay was disorderly and that within ten moves he would be able to disarm him, he became happy and he hurriedly increase the strength of his attack. Sure enough, as his sword slash was blocked by Yue Buqun, he felt the strength in Yue Buqun's arm was quite weak. Zuo Lengchan twirled his sword quickly and Yue Buqun was unable to hold on to his sword as it was sent shooting up into the sky. Songshan School's disciples cheered thunderously.

Suddenly, Yue Buqun rushed forward with his bare hands. Both of his hands attacked ruthlessly with seizing, stabbing, and slapping strikes. His body was floating like a ghost, shifting here and there. He shifted to the west, while his hand unthinkably attacked quickly and strangely. Zuo Lengchan was astonished and called out, "This... This... This..." and exerted himself to block.

Yue Buqun's long sword had dropped straight onto the place of worship penetrating the ground, but no one paid any attention to it.

"Dongfang Bubai!" Yingying whispered.

Linghu Chong was also thinking of the same thing. The move his master used at that moment was the same martial art that Dongfang Bubai had used with the embroidering needle when fighting against the four of them. He was so astonished that he forgot about his injury and stood up. From besides him, a small hand extended itself to hold him underneath the armpit, but he was completely oblivious to it. A pair of startled tender eyes were looking at him but he didn't notice that either. At that time, from among the thousands of people on the Songshan Mountaintop, there was only this pair of eyes that wasn't looking at the fight between Zuo Lengchan and Yue Buqun. From the beginning of the fight, Yilin had never taken her eyes off Linghu Chong.

Zuo Lengchan cried out ferociously, and Yue Buqun flew out to stand on the southwest corner of the place of the worship. Yue Buqun was only about a foot away from the

edge and his body was faltering looking like he was about to fall off the place of worship. The long sword in Zuo Lengchan's right hand was still dancing and it was getting faster and faster. The moves he used were Songshan sword arts. Every single move was protecting the fatal acupoints on his whole body. His sword art was wonderful and its power ferocious and each slash of the sword reverberated with the sound of wind generated by it. A lot of people were exclaiming loudly in praise. After a time, they realized that Zuo Lengchan was just brandishing his sword around his own body and never advanced to attack Yue Buqun. Something wasn't right.

His swordplay was only defending and there wasn't even half a move attacking Yue Buqun. With this kind of swordplay, it looked like he was just practising his swordplay. How could he cope with an attack from a strong opponent? Suddenly, Zuo Lengchan's sword pierced forward and stopped in mid air. He leaned his head slightly to one side, looking like he was trying to listen to some strange noise. The crowd saw a thin line of blood flowing from both of his eyes down to his cheeks and were dripping from his chin. From the crowd, someone exclaimed, "He's blind!"

This voice wasn't very loud, but Zuo Lengchan angrily shouted, "I'm not blind, I'm not blind! Which dog said I'm blind? Yue Buqun, Yue Buqun, you traitor! If you got guts, then come fight with your grandpa for three hundred more stances." His voice was getting louder and louder, and his voice was full of anger, pain, and hopelessness. He was just like a beast that had been mortally wounded roaring loudly in its death throes.

Yue Buqun was smiling as he stood at the corner of the place of worship.

When everyone had seen clearly that both of Zuo Lengchan's eyes had been blinded by Yue Buqun, they were all in utter disbelief. Only Linghu Chong and Yingying were not surprised by this. After Yue Buqun had lost his long

sword, the technique he used afterwards was very similar to the one Dongfang Bubai used. That day on Dark Wood Cliff, Ren Woxing, Linghu Chong, Xiang Wentian, and Shangguan Yun cooperated together to fight Dongfang Bubai but they were still not his match. Only after Yingying turned around to attack Yang Lianting that they were luckily spared. Even then, at the end, Ren Woxing was still blinded in one eye. At that time, there was only a thin line difference between life and death for all of them. When Yue Buqun's body started to float rapidly, even though he wasn't as good as Dongfang Bubai, it became certain that Zuo Lengchan would still lose when fighting him one on one. As expected, not long after, both of Zuo Lengchan's eyes were blinded by a needle.

Linghu Chong wasn't happy at all to see his master won. Instead, he suddenly felt indescribable fear in his heart. Yue Buqun's temper had always been peaceful and calm, and he had also treated Linghu Chong amiably. Linghu Chong had always regarded his master with affection and awe. Later on, when his master expelled him from the school, he knew it was because of his own faults. He felt it was a deserved punishment in reality because he liked to handle things eccentrically, unreasonably and do as he pleased. He was only hoping that Master and Master-Wife would be able to forgive him, and he had no anger towards them at all. But when he saw Master standing at the edge of the place of worship with his sleeves floating in the wind and his manner elegant and scholarly, without knowing why, an intense feeling of hatred rose up in his heart. Perhaps it was because the martial art Yue Buqun used had made him thought of Dongfang Bubai's grotesqueness, or perhaps he felt Master had won in an extremely dishonourable and unscrupulous manner. He was at a loss for some time when his wound suddenly became painful and he sat down dejectedly.

Yingying and Yilin extended their hands at the same time to support him while asking, "What's wrong?"

Linghu Chong shook his head and forced a smile. "Noth... Nothing."

They again heard Zuo Lengchan cried out, "Yue Buqun, you traitor! If you got guts, come out and fight to the death. Running here and there, what a disgraceful bastard! You... come, come and fight!"

Tang Yinge from Songshan School said, "Go up there and help master come down."

"Yes!" Two disciples, Shi Dengda and Di Xiuying, answered. They flew up the place of worship and said, "Master, let's go down!"

"Yue Buqun, you're afraid to come?" Zuo Lengchan shouted.

Shi Dengda extended his hand to help. "Mas..."

Suddenly, a light reflected. Zuo Lengchan slashed his long sword from Shi Dengda's left shoulder to his right waist, and followed by slashing at Di Xiuying's chest. These two attacks were very formidable, and the end was unthinkable. In a flash, the two Songshan School disciples had been chopped into four pieces. The crowd below gasped in fright, stunned.

Yue Buqun slowly walked towards the middle of the place of worship and said, "Brother Zuo, you're already handicapped so I won't fight you anymore. Are you still thinking of fighting me for the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School?"

Zuo Lengchan slowly lifted his long sword and pointed the sword at Yue Buqun's chest. Yue Buqun had no weapon in his hand. His long sword which had fallen from mid-air was still penetrated on the floor of the place of worship and was now lightly swaying in the wind. Yue Buqun inserted both of his hands into his sleeves, while both of his eyes stared unblinkingly at the sword point just three feet away from his chest. The blood on the sword point was dripping onto the ground with a light 'tap, tap, tap' sound. The sleeve on Zuo Lengchan's right hand started to puff up like a sail gathering



up wind. The sleeve on his left hand drooped down and looked ordinary which indicated that he had concentrated his whole energy into his right arm. The stirring of his internal energy made his sleeve billowed. This was not a small thing at all. It signalled that this attack would be as powerful as a thunderbolt when released.

Suddenly, a white blur was seen as Yue Buqun slid back more than ten feet and in a blink had come back to where he was standing. This retreat and return was done with such speed that it took only an instant. He just stood there for a moment before sliding to the left and back for more than ten feet, and just like before swiftly returned to his original place to face Zuo Lengchan's sword. Everyone had all seen it clearly. No matter how fierce or formidable Zuo Lengchan's attack would be, he still wouldn't be able to hit Yue Buqun.

Zuo Lengchan was confusedly thinking of many things. If his Qiankun Toss didn't pierce Yue Buqun's chest and Yue Buqun managed to avoid it, then with his two blind eyes, he would be prey to Yue Buqun without being able to fight back. He then thought of all the efforts he had put in into the planning of the merger of the five schools. He never expected that everything would have come to nothing. He had failed when success was just within his reach. Instead he had fallen into a plot. Suddenly, his heart turned sour and he felt warm blood rushing up. With a cry, fresh blood sprayed out from his mouth. Yue Buqun leaned slightly to one side and evaded the blood. His face was showing a smiling expression. Zuo Lengchan shook out his right hand, and the long sword broke in the middle. He immediately followed it by throwing it onto the ground. He looked up and laughed loudly, the sound of his laughter reverberating far throughout the valley. While still laughing, he turned his body around and strode purposefully off the place of worship. When he reached the edge of the place of worship, his left feet stepped in mid-air, but he was ready for this as his right leg kicked out and he flew down the place of worship.

A few disciples of Songshan School rushed forward and called out, "Master, we'll go together and chop up everyone from Huashan School."

Zuo Lengchan said in a clear voice, "Gentleman's words must be believed! It's already said it's a sword fight to take the leadership, and it will only depend on martial art to gain victory. Mr. Yue's martial art has gained him victory from me so everyone must now accept him as headmaster. How can you have thoughts of dissent?" When his eyes were first blinded, he was startled and angry, and couldn't help hurling abuses. But after he calmed down a bit, he regained the aura of a master and was very firm, resembling a grand hero. The entire crowd really admired him for this. Otherwise, with countless number of Songshan School's disciples here and their many helpers, along with the advantage they held here, if they actually fought with Huashan School's people, no matter how high Yue Buqun's martial art was, it would still be very hard to match the strength of Songshan School. Among the people who had come to Mount Songshan to mingle with the five mountains sword schools, many of them were there to curry favour with people higher than them. So when they heard what Zuo Lengchan said, they immediately cheered, "Let Mr. Yue be the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Let Mr. Yue be the Five Mountains School's headmaster!" The disciples of Huashan School exclaimed even louder. Actually, this outcome was really outside their expectations, and the disciples of Huashan School could hardly believe that this had happened.

Yue Buqun walked to the edge of the place of worship and folded his hands in salute. "When Brother Zuo and I were comparing our skills, we originally weren't going to hurt each other. But Martial Brother Zuo's martial art was just too high and he shook out the long sword out of my hand. So in desperation, I was just trying to protect myself and lost my discretion and resulted in harming Martial Brother Zuo's

eyes. My heart feels very uneasy about this. Let's look for a good doctor to treat Martial Brother Zuo."

Someone below said, "The blade has no eyes. How can it prevent injuries?"

Another person said, "You didn't keep going and kill him. That's very righteous."

"I don't deserve it!" Yue Buqun humbly replied. He was still cupping his hand in salute without talking, and he also didn't have any intention of going down the place of worship.

Someone below shouted, "Whoever wants to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster, go up and fight."

Another person said, "Anyone with too bright of eyes, go up and ask Mr. Yue to dig it out. That will be alright."

Hundreds of people called out in unison, "Mr. Yue be the Five Mountains School's headmaster, Mr. Yue be the Five Mountains School's headmaster!"

Yue Buqun waited for the clamour to calm down slightly before saying in a clear voice, "Since it's everyone's wish, I don't dare to decline. Today is the inauguration of the Five Mountains School so there's no set rules yet. I'll just follow the existing hierarchy. The matters in Hengshan, I'd like to ask Mr. Mo Da to preside over them. The affairs in Heng-Shan will still be managed by Brother Linghu Chong. The matters of Taishan, I'd like to ask Priest Yuqing and Priest Yuyin to get together with one of the foundation disciple of Martial Brother Tianmen to preside over the school. For the affairs of Songshan School, Martial Brother Zuo's eyes are an inconvenience, but it must be considered..." Yue Buqun paused for a while as his eyes ranged over the cluster of Songshan School's people. Then he slowly said, "In my opinion, I'd like to ask Martial Brother Tang Yingge and Martial Brother Lu Bai to preside over the daily matters of Songshan together with Martial Brother Zuo for the time being."

This was really beyond Lu Bai's expectation, and he stammered, "This... This..." The people of Songshan School

along with the people from the other schools were surprised to hear this.

Tang Yingge had been Zuo Lengchan's second-in-command for a long time so it was expected. But Lu Bai had just made things difficult for Yue Buqun by coldly ridiculing and hotly satirising him. He never expected Yue Buqun to forget all he did and appoint him to be one of the people to preside over Songshan School's affairs. The disciples of Songshan School were originally furious over the blinding of Zuo Lengchan's eyes, and many of them wished for an opportunity to arise to repay him in kind. But hearing Yue Buqun sending Tang Yingge, Lu Bai, and Zuo Lengchan to preside over Songshan's matters just as it were in its original state, they felt that Yue Buqun was not imposing his will on them by force and their anger somewhat cooled.

Yue Buqun said, "Today, our five mountains sword schools have merged. If we don't get along well, then this merger of the five schools will just be in words and will only be an empty name. From today onwards, everyone is in the same school and must get along well with each other. I have no virtue and no ability, and only temporarily hold the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School. So I must discuss with all the brothers here on all sorts of things. I don't dare to do it on my own. It's already night now and everyone is exhausted. Let us all go to Songshan's courtyard to rest, drink wine, and have some meals!" The crowd cheered and one by one went down from the mountaintop.

As Yue Buqun descended from the place of worship, Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and the other masters came over to congratulate him. Fangzheng and Chongxu were originally worried that once Zuo Lengchan had merged the five schools, his wild ambition would continue and he would want to annex Shaolin and Wudang, and brought disaster upon Wulin. Everyone knew Yue Buqun was a modest gentleman, so they were relieved that he was

wielding the power of the merged schools and their congratulations to him were sincere.

Great Master Fangzheng whispered, "Mr. Yue, at this moment, the intentions of the disciples of Songshan School are unpredictable and they're not favourable towards Shizhu. As the saying goes, we must not harbour ill intention towards other people, but we must guard ourselves. Shizu must be careful while you're on Mount Songshan."

"Yes, thank you for Great Master Abbot's advice," Yue Buqun replied.

"Mount Shaoshi is just a doorstep away from here, and it's very easy to answer to your call," Fangzheng said.

Yue Buqun saluted deeply by cupping his hands and said, "I'll remember Great Master's kind intention with gratitude." Then he spoke a few words with Priest Chongxu and Beggar Clan's leader Xie, before quickly going over to Linghu Chong and asking, "Chong'er, is your wound alright?"

Since the moment he expelled Linghu Chong from Huashan, this was the first time he had called him 'Chong'er' in such a pleased and warm manner. But Linghu Chong's heart was cold and he tremblingly said, "It's... It's not serious."

"Why don't you come back to Huashan with me to take care of your injury and get together with your Master-Wife again?" Yue Buqun asked. If Yue Buqun had asked this a few hours earlier, Linghu Chong would've been madly happy and would have agreed immediately. But now, he hesitated and was rather quite afraid to go up Huashan.

"So?" Yue Buqun asked.

"Heng-Shan School has good medicine, once disciple... disciple's injury is better, I'll come and visit Master and Master-Wife," Linghu Chong answered.

Yue Buqun turned his head slightly and gazed at his face, looking like he wanted to discover his real intention. After some time, he said, "That's also good! Set your mind at ease

and take care of your injury. I hope you can visit Huashan soon.”

“Yes!” Linghu Chong responded as he struggled to stand up to give his propriety.

Yue Buqun extended his hand to hold Linghu Chong’s right hand and warmly said, “There’s no need!” Linghu Chong contracted his body away from Yue Buqun’s hand while his face couldn’t help showing his fear. Yue Buqun snorted and scowled angrily, but then immediately smiled and sighed, “Your little martial sister is still like before. She still doesn’t know how soft or hard to be when she attacks. Luckily you didn’t get stabbed on your fatal acupoint!” He then nodded towards Yihe and Yiqing, who were the two most senior disciples, and slowly turned around. He walked towards a group of hundreds of people waiting for him. As he neared, those people surrounded him and praised his high martial art, his righteousness, and his appropriate handling of the matters. Crowding around him and flattering him continuously, they all went down from the mountaintop.

Linghu Chong kept an eye on the back of his master’s body until he disappeared from his view. The people from each school had also gone down from the mountaintop. Suddenly, he heard a female voice at his back uttered, “Hypocrite!” Linghu Chong faltered as his wound pained sharply and this word ‘Hypocrite’ was like a big hammer pounding on his chest. All of a sudden, he felt he couldn’t draw his breath anymore.

# **Chapter 35: Vengeance**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**





**Moonlight poured on the wide and straight road like a stream. Light fog and mist shrouded the trees by the road. Sweet smell from wild flowers was heavy for a moment and then light for the next. Small breeze stroked people's face. Linghu Chong hadn't had any wine for a long time, but now he felt a bit tipsy like he just had some.**

The sky gradually got darker, and finally there was no one else around the place of worship besides the Heng-Shan School people. "Martial Brother Headmaster, are we also going down?" Yihe questioned. She was still calling Linghu Chong as 'Martial Brother Headmaster', which meant that she did not acknowledge the merging of the five schools nor accept Yue Buqun to be their headmaster.

"We'll stay here for the night, is that alright?" Linghu Chong felt the further away he was from Yue Buqun, the better it was. Also, he did not wish to see Yue Buqun's face again at the Songshan's courtyard.

When he said this, the female disciples of the Heng-Shan School cheered happily. They all actually felt the same thing, and no one wished to go down. Back in Fuzhou, they had asked Huashan School to help their martial elders who were in trouble. But in spite of the motto 'Five mountains sword schools, same root different branches', Yue Buqun flatly refused to help them. Heng-Shan School's disciples had always kept this matter in their hearts. At the moment, everyone was still feeling angry that Linghu Chong had gotten injured by Yue Lingshan. So from the combination of all these together, they all refused to accept the fact that Yue Buqun had snatched the leadership of the Five Mountains School. Thus, staying by the place of the worship for the night was agreeable to them.

"Martial Brother Headmaster can't move too much, so staying here is best," Yiqing said agreeing with Linghu Chong. "But, this big brother..." As she said this, she glanced toward Yingying.

"This isn't a big brother," Linghu Chong laughed. "She's young lady Ren."

Yingying had been supporting Linghu Chong all this time, but when she heard him divulging her identity, she became bashful and quickly stood up to flee for a few steps. Linghu Chong wasn't guarding against this so his body tipped backwards. Yilin, who was standing besides him, quickly extended her hand to hold his left shoulder and called out, "Careful!"

Yihe, Yiqing, and the others all knew Yingying and Linghu Chong had a deep love for each other. One of them was willing to risk her life at Shaolin temple because of love, while the other led a group of Jianghu heroes to attack Shaolin temple because of her. When Linghu Chong became the headmaster of the Heng-Shan School, this young lady Ren came personally to congratulate him and she also defeated the scheming of the Devil Sect. It could be said she had done a big favour for Heng-Shan School. When they heard this big bearded man in front of them was young lady Ren, mixed feelings of happiness and surprise rose up. The disciples of Heng-Shan School had long regarded this young lady Ren to be their future Headmaster-Wife, so when they saw her, they felt very intimate towards her.

After Yihe and some of the other disciples took care of provisions such as clear water and meals, they lay down besides the place of worship. Because of his serious injury, Linghu Chong also felt sleepy and exhausted, so he fell into a deep sleep in a short time.

In the middle of the night, from somewhere far away, they suddenly heard a female voice shouting, "Who's there?"

Even though Linghu Chong was heavily injured, his internal energy was still abundant. When he heard this, he promptly woke up and knew it was a Heng-Shan School disciple guarding the perimeter asking someone who was coming up the peak. He heard someone answered, "I'm a

disciple from the same Five Mountains School. I'm Headmaster Yue's disciple, Lin Pingzhi."

"Why did you come here in the middle of the night?" the Heng-Shan School disciple who was on night watch duty inquired.

"I have an appointment underneath the place of worship," Lin Pingzhi answered. "I didn't know martial sisters are resting here. Sorry for the offence." His speech was very polite.

"Little kid surnamed Lin, you're trying to win by number concealing your Five Mountains School's friends here," an elder's voice came from the west. "Are you trying to give me trouble?"

Linghu Chong recognised the voice to be Qingcheng School's headmaster, Yu Canghai. He was startled and thought, "Martial brother Lin has an enmity with Yu Canghai for killing his parents. This appointment must be for repaying his blood debt."

"I didn't know the martial sisters from Heng-Shan are resting here," Lin Pingzhi replied. "Let's find someplace else to settle our business so we don't bother their dreams."

"So we don't bother their dreams? Hey, hey, you've already disturbed them, but you're trying to be the nice guy now. Like father-in-law, like son-in-law. What do you have to say? Quickly say it now so we can all go back to sleep peacefully," Yu Canghai laughed loudly.

"I don't think that you'll be able to sleep peacefully ever again," Lin Pingzhi coldly said. "When your Qingcheng School came to Mount Songshan, you brought thirty four people with you. I made an appointment with you only, how come three came?"

Yu Canghai looked up and laughed loudly. "Who do you think you are? Do you think you're worthy to talk to me like that? Your father-in-law is the new headmaster of the Five Mountains School, so I came here to listen to what you have to say just to give him face. What do you want to fart about?"

Let's hear it. If you want to fight then draw your sword and let me see your Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art. Let's see how much you've improved."

Linghu Chong slowly sat up. Under the pale moonlight, he saw Lin Pingzhi and Yu Canghai facing each other at around thirty feet apart. Linghu Chong thought, "That day when I was injured in Hengshan, this shorty Yu wanted to kill me. Luckily Martial Brother Lin showed himself and interfered, and saved my life. If that shorty Yu had hit me on that day, how can Linghu Chong be alive today? Martial Brother Lin's martial art has advanced greatly since he joined the Huashan School but he still won't be at the level of this shorty Yu. He made the appointment here with shorty Yu; Master and Master-Wife must surely be behind him to help. But if Master and Master-Wife didn't come then I can't just stand by and do nothing."

Yu Canghai laughed derisively. "If you got guts then come by yourself to Mount Qingcheng to get your revenge, instead of making a surreptitious appointment here with me while concealing a group of nuns here to ambush me. What a joke, what a joke!"

When Yihe heard this, she couldn't hold back her anger and shouted, "Whatever love or hatred this kid surnamed Lin has toward you, what's that got to do with our Heng-Shan School? You shorty priest, you talk nonsense! You can fight till you die, we're just here to watch. I know you're afraid, but don't drag Heng-Shan School into it." She was very resentful towards Yue Lingshan. When you like someone, you like everything associated with that person. When you don't like someone, you don't like anything associated with that person. So by this reasoning, Yihe also detested Yue Lingshan's husband.

Yu Canghai and Zuo Lengchan had always been friends. Zuo Lengchan had personally written two letters to invite him to the monastery to strengthen the situation today. So when Yu Canghai came to Mount Songshan at this time, he

expected Zuo Lengchan to become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. That was why even though the Huashan School's people had an enmity with him, he didn't care about it in the least. But who could've thought this headmaster position of the Five Mountains School was unexpectedly snatched by Yue Buqun? Because of this unexpected event, the Qingcheng School didn't feel like staying on Mount Songshan and was going to go down the mountain that very night. As the Qingcheng School's party was going down from the Songshan mountaintop, Lin Pingzhi walked up besides him and whispered about the appointment. He wanted Yu Canghai to meet him tonight beneath the place of worship. Even though Lin Pingzhi spoke quietly, he was very rude in his expression and in his choice of words which made it hard for Yu Canghai to decline. At that time, Yu Canghai pondered, "Your Huashan School has just come into power as head of the Five Mountains School and yet you've become arrogant already. But you're still green and the Five Mountains School might still split up, so I'm not afraid of you at all. But I must protect against your helpers attacking in numbers."

With that thought in his mind, Yu Canghai deliberately came to the meeting a bit late to see if Lin Pingzhi had brought a large number of helpers with him. When he saw Lin Pingzhi had turned up to the peak all by himself, he was delighted. He then brought two of the Qingcheng School's people to the peak with him, while the rest was dispersed around the waist of the mountain to alert him if anyone was coming up to the peak. But, when he reached the peak, he saw there were many people sleeping underneath the place of worship. Yu Canghai inwardly felt miserable and thought, "A thirty years old mother has been defeated by a little baby. I only checked if he brought helpers with him up to the peak. I never thought his helpers would already be waiting on top of the peak. I've walked into their ambush. Now I have to think of a way to get out of it."

He knew Heng-Shan School's martial art wasn't below Qingcheng School's. Even though three of their senior Shi Tai had passed away and Linghu Chong had also been seriously injured and the current stature of Heng-Shan School was on the wane as they were left with no master-hands, there were still a lot of them. If the hundreds of nuns form their sword formations to attack, the situation would be extremely dangerous. When he heard what Yihe said, he felt relieved even though she was being very rude to him and insulted him by calling him 'shorty'. Her words made it clear that Heng-Shan School wouldn't help Lin Pingzhi.

"It's very good you are not helping each other," Yu Canghai said. "There's no harm for everyone to open your eyes widely and watch my Qingcheng School's swordplay, and see how it compares to Huashan School's swordplay." He paused for a tick before continuing, "Everyone, Yue Buqun was lucky to defeat Martial Brother Zuo because I don't think his swordplay is very good. Every family and every school in Wulin has its own unique skill. Huashan sword art isn't necessarily able enough to rule the world. From what I see, Heng-Shan sword art is much better compared to Huashan's." Heng-Shan School's disciples did not know whether his words had a double meaning or not. But Yihe didn't care about it as she said, "Hey, you two, if you want to fight then fight. Quit yapping your mouth here in the middle of the night disturbing people's sleep. How inconsiderate!"

Yu Canghai was fuming but he thought, "I have to deal with this kid Lin today, so I can't settle my debt with you stinking nuns right now. But from today onwards, whenever I cross paths with your Heng-Shan School, I'll make sure to give you a lot of trouble." He was a petty person and was used to being arrogant. If the people of the generation below him didn't show much respect and didn't speak flatteringly when meeting him, he would become unhappy. If Yihe had said those words at any other time, he would've blown his top.

Lin Pingzhi walked up a couple of steps. "Yu Canghai, you've long coveted my family's sword art and killed my parents for it. Even the dozens of people from my Fortune Prestige Escort agency were all killed by your Qingcheng School. Your blood will compensate this blood debt tonight."

"My own son was killed by you, Pig!" Yu Canghai shouted in anger. "Even if you hadn't come looking for me, I would've cut you into thousands of pieces and peeled your flesh off, Dog! Were you trying to hide by becoming a disciple of Huashan and getting Yue Buqun as your backer?" With a ringing sound, he drew his long sword out of its scabbard. It was the fifteenth of the month that day so there was a bright moon in the sky. Even though his body was short, the sword was long. The moonlight reflected off the steel like rippling water. The sword in front of his body was trembling. The situation was far from ordinary.

Heng-Shan disciples all thought, "This shorty's reputation isn't a small matter." Lin Pingzhi still hadn't drawn his sword as he walked up another two steps. He was now only around ten feet apart from Yu Canghai. His head was slightly turned while his eyes were full of fire observing Yu Canghai.

When Lin Pingzhi did not draw his sword, Yu Canghai thought, "You, little kid, are very reckless. If I use the 'Flood Dragon Soaring from the Deep Blue Pool' now, you'd have a new mouth two and a half feet long from your lower abdomen to your throat. But you're a junior to me so I can't move first." Then he shouted, "Still not drawing your sword?" He was waiting for Lin Pingzhi to press his hand on his sword handle and start drawing his sword out. At the moment before Lin Pingzhi's sword was completely out of the scabbard, he would use the move 'Flood Dragon Soaring from the Deep Blue Pool' to cut his stomach. Heng-Shan disciples would then only be able to say his hand was fast but not that it was a sneak attack. Linghu Chong saw the long sword trembling in Yu Canghai's hand and he called out, "Martial brother Lin, be careful, he's going to stab at your stomach."

Lin Pingzhi laughed mockingly and suddenly rushed forward. His move was extremely fast, as in an instant, there was only a distance of less than one foot between him and Yu Canghai. Their noses were practically touching. This rushing move was so strange that no one could have imagined it, and it was so fast that it was very hard to describe. With this single rush, the long sword on Yu Canghai's right hand was now behind his opponent's body and there was no way for him to bend his long sword to stab the back of Lin Pingzhi's body. Lin Pingzhi's left hand was also holding Yu Canghai's right shoulder while his right hand was pressing against Yu Canghai's chest. Yu Canghai felt tingling pain on the 'Shoulder Well' acupoint on his shoulder and felt his right arm became weak and the long sword dropped from his hand. Everyone saw how Lin Pingzhi subdued his opponent in just one move and how his hand movements were strange. His movements looked exactly like the moves Yue Buqun used to defeat Zuo Lengchan, even the movement path he had taken was exactly the same. Linghu Chong turned his head around to look at Yingying. They stared at each other and cried out quietly at the same time, "Dongfang Bubai!"

Linghu Chong and Yingying were staring at each other and they both saw fear and dismay in each other's eyes. It was obvious Lin Pingzhi's move was the same as the martial art that Dongfang Bubai used on that day at Dark Wood Cliff. Lin Pingzhi didn't force out the gathered energy in his right hand as he saw the dread on Yu Canghai's face lighted under the moonlight. It couldn't be said that Lin Pingzhi was feeling happy as he felt that death would have come too easily for Yu Canghai if he was killed in just one move.

In that moment, from somewhere far, they heard Yue Lingshan shouting, "Brother Ping, Brother Ping! Father told you not to bother him for now." She was running up the peak as she shouted. When she saw Lin Pingzhi and Yu Canghai standing face to face, she was stupefied. She rushed forward a few steps and saw Lin Pingzhi was holding Yu Canghai's



fatal acupoint on one hand while his other hand was on Yu Canghai's chest. She let out a sigh of relieve. "Father said Priest Yu is our guest today and we shouldn't make any trouble for him."

Lin Pingzhi snorted and added more internal energy into pressing Yu Canghai's 'Shoulder Well' acupoint. Yu Canghai's major acupoint became even more painful, but when he examined it closer, he found his opponent's internal energy was ordinary and there was nothing special about it. It was only painful because it was pressing on his major acupoint. Otherwise according to the theory of internal energy cultivation, Lin Pingzhi was still far below him. In that realisation, he felt sadness and anger mixed together in his heart. Clearly, his opponent's martial art was sloppy and ordinary. Even if Lin Pingzhi studied for ten more years, he still wouldn't be his match. But Lin Pingzhi had now taken advantage of his negligence and his reputation would now be gone forever. Furthermore, Lin Pingzhi wanted to avenge his parents so most likely he wouldn't listen to his master's order and thus take his life right now.

"Father told you to spare his life today," Yue Lingshan pleaded. "Are you afraid he's going to run off to the edge of the world?"

Lin Pingzhi lifted his left palm and slapped Yu Canghai twice. Yu Canghai was furious, but his enemy's right hand was still pressed against his chest. This youngster's internal energy was not good but when he exerted his energy, it still shook Yu Canghai's heart meridian. If this right palm were to kill him, it would have been the best thing for him. But the thing he feared most was Lin Pingzhi using a fourth or fifth class internal energy which would make him dead but not dead, alive but not alive, and make him very miserable. He weighed the importance of the matter in a flash and didn't dare to move at all. After Lin Pingzhi had slapped him twice, he laughed long and hard before jumping back around thirty feet away. Lin Pingzhi turned his head slightly to regard Yu

Canghai. Yu Canghai wanted to pick his sword up but he considered himself to be a senior and he was already subdued in just one move. If he foolhardily rushed forward to fight under the eyes of so many people, that could be said like a beggar fighting. Compared to losing the fight, he would be even more ashamed. So even if he took a step across to continue fighting, he wouldn't have taken the second step. Lin Pingzhi sneered and walked away. He unexpectedly didn't pay any attention even to his wife.

Yue Lingshan stamped her feet, and took a glance toward Linghu Chong who was sitting underneath the place of worship. She immediately walked towards him and said, "Big martial brother, your... your wound is alright?"

As soon as Linghu Chong heard her voice in the beginning, his heart was already racing. At this time he got even more excited, he stammered out, "I... I... I..."

"Don't worry, he won't die!" Yihe coldly said to Yue Lingshan.

Yue Lingshan heard her but didn't listen to her. Her eyes gazed at Linghu Chong, and she quietly said, "When I lost my sword, I... I didn't mean to injure you."

"Yes," Linghu Chong replied. "Of course I know, of course I know... I... I... of course I know." He had always been open-minded and carefree, but in front of his little martial sister, he became very muddle headed. He said the word 'of course I know' for three times, not knowing what he was driving at.

"Your injury is very heavy, I'm extremely sorry, but I hope you won't blame me," Yue Lingshan apologetically said.

"No, I won't, of course I won't blame you."

Yue Lingshan silently sighed and lowered her head. She quietly said, "I'm going!"

"You... you want to go?" Linghu Chong's disappointment was evident in his speech and expression.

Yue Lingshan slowly walked away with her head down. Just before she went down the mountaintop, she stopped and turned around. "Big martial brother, about the two martial

sisters of Heng-Shan School who came to Huashan, father said we're being impolite and we're very sorry. When we return to Huashan, we'll make up for our offence and accompany them down the mountain."

"Yes, very good, very... very good!" Linghu Chong watched her as she went down the mountaintop until she disappeared behind a pine tree. He suddenly thought of the time on the Cliff of Contemplation when she delivered wine and meals to him every day. But when she left, he had always been reluctant to part and only managed to utter a few words, until finally she shifted her feelings toward Lin Pingzhi and her feelings toward him changed. When he pondered of the things that happened in the past, he was only making things difficult for himself. Suddenly he heard Yihe coldly laughed and said, "What's so good about that girl? Her heart's undecided, and she doesn't treat people with the least bit of sincerity at all. Compared to our young lady Ren, she's not even fit to carry her shoes."

Linghu Chong was surprised and not until now did he think of Yingying who was besides him. He treated little martial sister in such an absentminded manner, of course Yingying had seen it all. His face couldn't help becoming hot. But he saw Yingying leaning on the corner of the place of worship looking like she had dozed off. He thought, "It's good that she's fallen asleep." But Yingying was so alert, how could she have fallen asleep at that time? Linghu Chong knew he was lying to himself. He tried to find a few words to say to her, but he didn't know what to say. But to repay Yingying, he immediately thought of something. At this time, there were no words that could be said, and the best thing to do was not to say anything. However, the best way would be to lead her thought away from what just happened. So he lied down slowly and suddenly groaned lightly like he had hit his wound and it was feeling painful. Of course Yingying would be worried so she came over and quietly asked, "Does it hurt?"

"It's alright," Linghu Chong answered and extended his hand to hold Yingying's hand. Yingying wanted to snatch her hand back but Linghu Chong was gripping it pretty tightly. She was afraid if she used too much force then it'll hurt his wound so she just let him hold her hand. Linghu Chong had lost a lot of blood and was feeling very sleepy, so he slept deeply not long after that.

When dawn broke, the whole mountain was basked in crimson sunlight. Everyone was afraid to startle him into wakefulness so no one dared to say anything. Linghu Chong felt his hand was empty. He didn't know how long it was before Yingying pulled her hand back. But both of her eyes were staring at his face looking very concerned. Linghu Chong smiled at her and sat up. "Let's go back to Heng-Shan!"

At this time, Tian Boguang had already chopped a tree down and made a stretcher out of it. So Monk No Commandment and he carried Linghu Chong to go down the mountain peak. When their party passed by the Songshan's courtyard, they saw Yue Buqun was waiting for them at the entrance with his face smiling, wanting to see them off. Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan weren't besides him.

"Master, disciple can't kowtow to bid you goodbye," Linghu Chong said.

"No need, no need," Yue Buqun smiled. "We'll talk when your injury is better. I have no one to help me in my position as the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Later on, I have to rely upon you in helping me with a lot of things." Linghu Chong forced out a smile.

Monk No Commandment and Tian Boguang carried him and walked quickly like they were flying, and they walked very far in just a short time. On the mountain road, they passed by the groups that had come to the meeting at Mount Songshan. When they reached the foot of the mountain, they hired mule-drawn carriages and let Linghu Chong and Yingying rode in them.

When night fell, they came upon a small town and saw a teahouse shed with lots of people sitting inside. They were all from Qingcheng School and Yu Canghai was also among them. When he saw the disciples of Heng-Shan arriving, his face changed colour and he turned his back towards them. The small town had no other teahouse so the Heng-Shan's people sat down on a rock step on the opposite eaves to rest. Zheng E and Qin Juan went inside the teahouse to get some hot tea for Linghu Chong to drink.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of galloping horses and two horses came over with dust flying behind them. When they arrived in front of the town, the two horses were reined in. There were one male and one female riding the horses; they were Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan.

"Yu Canghai, you know I didn't give permission for you to rest, why don't you run away quickly? Are you waiting for death here?" Lin Pingzhi called out.

Linghu Chong was on the mule-drawn carriage when he heard Lin Pingzhi's voice. He asked, "Martial brother Lin has caught up?"

Qin Juan was sitting inside the carriage waiting for him to drink his tea, she immediately rolled open the curtain on the carriage to let him observe the happenings outside the carriage. Yu Canghai was sitting on a stool sipping a cup of tea in his hand and did not pay attention to Lin Pingzhi. After he had taken another sip, he said, "I'm waiting here to send you to your death."

"Good!" Lin Pingzhi responded. This word 'good' had just been spoken when he had already jumped down his horse, had his sword out, thrust it forward, leapt back on his horse and with a shout rode away with Yue Lingshan. A disciple of Qingcheng School who was standing on the side of the street had a gash on his chest sprouting blood, then he slowly fell over.

This attack done by Lin Pingzhi was strange and unpredictable. When he dismounted and had his sword out,

it looked like he was going to attack Yu Canghai. When Yu Canghai saw him attacking, it was precisely what he wished for and he secretly felt happy. He expected that when they fight, he would be able to take Lin Pingzhi's life to avenge for last night's insult. If Yue Buqun later came for him, that was a matter for the future. But who could've thought the opponent's sword would be able to change direction in midair, and fast as lightning killed a Qingcheng disciple, then got on his horse to run away. Yu Canghai was alarmed and angry at the same time as he leapt to chase, but his two enemies had ridden their horses very fast and there was no way for him to chase them.

The attack by Lin Pingzhi just then was immeasurably weird and unbelievably quick. Linghu Chong's jaw dropped from seeing it and he thought, "If he used this attack on me, and I don't have a weapon with me, then I'd have no way of fighting back and I would've been killed by him." He pondered over the swordplay and knew Lin Pingzhi's skill was far below him. But the move Lin Pingzhi used just then was so fast, even he wouldn't be able to break it.

Yu Canghai was stamping his feet and angrily pointing at the dust left behind by Lin Pingzhi's horse as he hurled abuses at them. But Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan had gone very far, how could they hear his abuses? His whole body was filled with anger and there was nowhere to vent it. He turned around and scolded, "You stinking nuns, you knew that Lin was coming so you came here first to help him. Alright, that animal Lin, has run away. Whoever got the nerves, come and fight to the death with me."

The number of Heng-Shan disciples was multiples that of Qingcheng School's people. Furthermore they also had some good fighters like Monk No Commandment, Yingying, Peach Valley Six Fairies, and Tian Boguang. If they were to actually fight, Qingcheng School had no hope of winning. Yu Canghai knew the strengths and weaknesses of both parties, but he was in a rage, so even though he was experienced and

careful, he couldn't restrain himself. Yihe promptly pulled her long sword out and angrily replied, "If you want to fight, then come. Who's afraid of you?"

"Martial Sister Yihe, ignore him," Linghu Chong said.

Yingying whispered a few words to the Peach Valley Six Fairies. Peachtree Root Fairy, Peachtree Trunk Fairy, Peachtree Branch Fairy, and Peachtree Leaf Fairy suddenly flew towards a horse underneath the cool shed. That horse was Yu Canghai's ride. A neighing sound was heard as the Peach Valley Four Fairies separately grabbed each of the horse's legs and tugged hard at them. With a loud ripping sound, that horse was torn into four pieces and its internal organs and blood flew out everywhere. It was a big and strong horse, but with just their bare hands, the Peach Valley Four Fairies had unexpectedly ripped it apart. The four of them had such rarely seen powerful strength.

Qingcheng School's disciples were startled and all their faces changed colour. Even the people from Heng-Shan School were frightened till their hearts were thumping loudly.

"Old priest Yu, that Lin has an enmity towards you," Yingying said. "We're not going to help any party and we're just going to be spectators on the side, so don't implicate us. If you really want to fight, you're not our match so why don't we all just save our strength?"

Yu Canghai was frightened and became timid. So with a hissing sound, he put his long sword back into its sheath. "River water doesn't mix with well water. You go your own way and we'll go our own way. Please go first."

"That won't do, we're going with you," Yingying replied.

"Why?" Yu Canghai scowled.

"To be frank," Yingying explained, "that Lin's sword art is really weird, so we must see it."

Linghu Chong was surprised. What Yingying just said was exactly what he was thinking about. Lin Pingzhi's swordplay was really weird, and 'Dugu Nine Swords' seemed incapable of breaking it, so he wanted to have a clearer look at it.

"You want to see that little kid's sword art, what's that got to do with me?" When these words came out of Yu Canghai's mouth, he knew he had said the wrong thing. His enmity with Lin Pingzhi was as deep as the ocean, so Lin Pingzhi wouldn't just kill one Qingcheng disciple and give up. He would surely come back to seek his revenge, and Heng-Shan School's people wanted to see how Lin Pingzhi used his sword and how he would kill the people of Qingcheng School. Anyone who studied martial arts would wish to observe other peculiar martial arts out there, and everyone in the Heng-Shan School used sword so they weren't willing to just let this opportunity passed them by. But they would be following the Qingcheng School who were like lambs going to the slaughter, and they would see how a butcher chopped them up. From among the people in the world who take advantage of other people, how could anything exceed this?

Yu Canghai was feeling angry and he wanted to say something sarcastic, but he held it in and only lightly snorted. He thought, "This little kid Lin is only using some weird moves and he despicably did sneak attacks on me, and on both attacks, my hand wasn't fast enough. Could it be that he has no real skills? Otherwise, why didn't he dare to fight me openly? Alright, you'll follow and I'll let you see clearly how I'm going to chop that little animal into little pieces." He turned around and returned to his seat under the shed. He picked up the teapot to pour himself a cup of tea but he heard a 'ta, ta, ta' sound as his right arm trembled, and the teapot's lid rattled. Just then when Lin Pingzhi was in front of him, he was calm and collected, slowly sipping his cup of tea, and wasn't muddled when facing a strong enemy. But now, his heart couldn't help thinking, "Why's my hand trembling? Why's my hand trembling?" He exhorted himself to be stronger and calm himself down, but the teapot lid kept on rattling. The disciples of Qingcheng School thought their master was being very angry. Actually, deep in Yu Canghai's



heart, he knew he was terrified. If Lin Pingzhi's sword had been directed at him, he wouldn't have been able to block it.

Even after Yu Canghai had finished a cup of tea, his heart was still troubled and he ordered the disciples to bury the dead disciple in the wilderness outside the town, while the remaining people rested underneath the cool shed. The inhabitants of the town were already scared when they witnessed a person who had killed another person from far away, so they all closed their doors tightly. Who would dare to take a peek?

The Heng-Shan School party scattered into the shop and under the eaves of other people's houses to sleep. Yingying sat alone in her mule carriage, and was quite far away from the mule carriage that Linghu Chong was riding in. Even though the whole world already knew of the love between Linghu Chong and her, her bashfulness wasn't the slightest bit lessened. Even when Heng-Shan disciples reapplied the medicine on Linghu Chong's wound, she didn't go to have a look. Zheng E and Qin Juan knew her heart, so they continuously told her the condition of Linghu Chong's injury. Yingying only nodded her head and didn't say anything.

Linghu Chong pondered about the sword move Lin Pingzhi used. There was nothing special about the sword move in itself, but the move was done too suddenly and there was no indication that it was going to be executed at all. No matter who was attacked by this move, even if that person was a master, that person would find it hard to counter the move. That day on Dark Wood Cliff, they besieged Dongfang Bubai and he was just holding a piece of embroidering needle to fight them. But the four of them, who were masters, had no way to resist him. When he thought about it at this time, it wasn't because Dongfang Bubai had a high internal energy nor was it because his moves were extremely skilful, but it was because his movements were fast like lightning. His attack, defense, rush, and retreat were all completely beyond his opponents' expectations. When Lin

Pingzhi stopped Yu Canghai underneath the place of worship and when he killed that Qingcheng School disciple with his sword, his martial art was exactly the same as Dongfang Bubai's and the thrust Yue Buqun had used to blind Zuo Lengchan's eyes. Evil Resisting Sword Art and Dongfang Bubai's 'Sunflower Manual' had the same source, so he guessed that the move that Yue Buqun and Lin Pingzhi used must be the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art'.

When he thought till here, he couldn't help shaking his head and mumbled, "Evil resisting, evil resisting! Resist what evil? This martial art is evil itself." Then he thought, "At the present time, the only one who can go up against this sword art is probably only Grand Martial Uncle Feng. After my injury is healed, I must go back up to Huashan and ask for Grand Martial Uncle Feng's advice on how to break this sword art. Grand Martial Uncle Feng said he doesn't want to see people from the Huashan School, but I'm no longer from Huashan School at this time." His thought then continued, "Dongfang Bubai is already dead. Yue Buqun is my master, Lin Pingzhi is my martial brother. The two of them wouldn't use this sword art to go up against me, then why do I need to go research on how to break this sword art?" Suddenly he thought of something and sat up abruptly. As he moved, the mule carriage shook and his wound became really painful that he gasped.

Qin Juan was standing besides the cart and she quickly asked, "Do you want to drink tea?"

"No, little martial sister, please ask young lady Ren to come here." Qin Juan acknowledged his request and went to get Yingying. After a while, Yingying followed Qin Juan back. She asked lightly, "What's the matter?"

"I suddenly thought of something. Your father once said, your sect's 'Sunflower Manual' was given to Dongfang Bubai. So I thought the martial art in 'Sunflower Manual' isn't as good as the divine martial art your father is practising, but..."

"But my father's martial art was shown to be not as good as Dongfang Bubai's, is that right?"

"That's right. I don't understand why."

For people who studied martial art, when they saw a wonderful book of martial art, if they didn't learn it by themselves, they would give it to another person like their father, spouse, martial disciple, brothers, or their lovers, and they would probably study it together. To give up on it was really out of the ordinary.

"I've already asked my dad about this before," Yingying said. "He said: One, the martial art in the Manual can't be learnt; it'll be harmful to learn it. Two, he also didn't know that after learning the martial art written on the Manual, the result would be so powerful."

"Can't be learnt? Why?"

Yingying's face turned red. "Why can't it be learnt? How would I know?" After a pause, she went on, "What's so good about Dongfang Bubai's fate?"

Linghu Chong groaned and inwardly felt that his master was on the way in following Dongfang Bubai's path. He had now defeated Zuo Lengchan and snatched the leadership of the Five Mountains School. Linghu Chong didn't like this situation at all. 'Long Live the Chief, unify the Jianghu', those were the flattering words which were often said on the Dark Wood Cliff. In Linghu Chong's heart, it seemed it would also gradually become Yue Buqun's motto.

"Take care of your injury, don't think too much," Yingying quietly said. "I'm going to sleep."

"Yes." He lifted the curtain on the carriage and saw the moonlight shining down on Yingying's face. Suddenly, he felt apologetic toward her. Yingying slowly turned around to go but suddenly she said, "Your martial brother Lin wears a flowery gown." After she said this, she went toward her own carriage.

Linghu Chong thought it was strange. "She said Martial Brother Lin is wearing a flowery gown. What does she mean?"

Martial Brother Lin has just become a groom so he's wearing the gown a newly-married groom wears. There's nothing strange about that. This little girl, not paying attention to someone's sword art, but instead paying attention to what someone else is wearing. How interesting."

When he closed his eyes, he could see Lin Pingzhi's sword moves in his mind, but he couldn't remember what kind of flowery gown Lin Pingzhi was wearing. He slept till the middle of the night when he heard horses galloping towards them from somewhere far. Two horses were coming from the west. Linghu Chong sat up and lifted the screen. Out on the street, he saw Heng-Shan disciples and Qingcheng School's people all awake. Heng-Shan disciples had formed groups of seven to form the sword formation and they were standing still by their position. Some Qingcheng people were rushing towards the end of the street while some were leaning their backs to the wall. They were far different from the calm and collected Heng-Shan disciples.

The two horses galloped through the big street. With the moonlight shining brightly, it was easy to see that it was the Lin Pingzhi husband and wife couple coming.

"Yu Canghai!" Lin Pingzhi called out. "In order to steal my Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art, you killed my parents. Now, I'm going to execute the moves one by one to give you a look. Pay close attention!"

He reined in his horse and flew down from his horse. His long sword was still strapped on his back as he rushed towards the Qingcheng School's people. Linghu Chong paid attention to what he was wearing and saw that he was wearing a green jade gown with seams threaded with gold, sleeves embroidered with deep yellow flowers, and a gold belt tied around his waist. With Lin Pingzhi's lightning fast movement, the gown gorgeously glittered under the moonlight. Linghu Chong thought, "Martial Brother Lin was originally very plain. Once he became a groom, he has become very different. It's no wonder youngsters are usually

proud of themselves. He's taken such a wife, of course he's very happy and wanted to dress up a bit."

Last night besides the place of worship, Lin Pingzhi made a surprise attack on Yu Canghai with his bare hand. Now, he was doing exactly the same thing. How could Qingcheng School let him do it again? Yu Canghai shouted and four disciples immediately went up to meet him with their swords up. Two swords were aimed at his left and right chest, and the other two swords swept at his left and right legs. Peach Valley Six Fairies were startled and they couldn't help shouting. The three of them shouted, "Little kid, careful!" The other three shouted, "Careful, little kid!"

Lin Pingzhi extended his right hand and with a matchless speed, pressed on the wrists of the two Qingcheng disciples who were attacking his chest to turn their hands around and pushed on the elbows of the two Qingcheng disciples who were chopping at his lower body. Four miserable cries were heard as two of them fell over. These two people were originally attacking Lin Pingzhi's chest, but when their wrists were pressed, their long swords turned around and pierced their own stomachs.

"Evil Resisting Sword Art, stance number two and stance number three! Did you see it clearly?" Lin Pingzhi called out. He then turned around and galloped off on his horse. The Qingcheng people were stunned and none of them gave chase. When they saw the other two disciples, they saw one of them had his long sword slantingly piercing the other's chest from below, and the other person had done the same. These two people had stopped breathing but their right hands were still clutching on their sword handles making their bodies support each other and preventing them from falling down. Linghu Chong saw clearly the way Lin Pingzhi executed his press and push. He was astonished but felt admiration in his heart. He thought, "Brilliant, that's really a sword art and not a hand seizing technique. It's just that there was no sword in his hand."

The moonlight illuminated the ground and showed Yu Canghai's short body standing besides the four corpses lost in his thought. Qingcheng School's people encircled him but gave him a wide berth. No one dared to say anything. After a long time had passed, Linghu Chong gazed outside of his carriage again and saw Yu Canghai was still standing there unmoving as his shadow gradually lengthened. This scene was extremely eerie.

Some of the Qingcheng disciples had walked away, and some had sat down on the ground, while Yu Canghai was still standing stiffly like a corpse. Linghu Chong felt pity for him. This master of Qingcheng School didn't know what to do and was just waiting for death and that made Linghu Chong feel very sorry for him. He gradually became sleepy and finally went to sleep. While dreaming, he suddenly felt his mule carriage moving followed by some shouts. The sky had actually brightened and the people had started on their journey. He took a peek from the side of the carriage and saw they were on a very straight road. Some disciples of the Qingcheng School were riding on horseback and some were walking. Seeing their dejected and withered bodies from the back, Linghu Chong felt an unspeakable misery surrounding them. They looked like a group of cow and sheep walking to the slaughter house. He thought, "All these people know Lin Pingzhi will come again, and they also know they have no way of fighting back. If they scattered to run away, then Qingcheng School will be destroyed. Could it be, when Lin Pingzhi go up Mount Qingcheng, there will be no one to answer him at the Pine Wind Monastery?"

At noon, they arrived at a big town. The people of Qingcheng ate their meals in a wine shop, while the disciples of Heng-Shan School went to the opposite restaurant to eat. The Qingcheng people were eating quickly with big bowls and big cups, while the nuns all ate quietly. Everyone knew these people were only living from dawn to dusk and surviving from meal to meal.

At the hour of Wei (1-3pm), they were going along the bank of a river when they heard sound of galloping horses. It was the Lin Pingzhi husband and wife couple riding towards them. Yihe whistled and the disciples of Heng-Shan School stopped immediately. With the orange sun beating down on them, the two horses galloped alongside the river. When they got near, Yue Lingshan reined her horse in first, while Lin Pingzhi continued to come forward. Yu Canghai swept his hand across and his people turned around to rush south along the river.

"Shorty Yu, where are you running off to?" Lin Pingzhi laughed loudly as he rushed forward on his horse. Yu Canghai suddenly turned around with the sword in his hand. The reflection from the sword was like a rainbow as it thrust towards Lin Pingzhi's face. This attack was unexpectedly very fierce and Lin Pingzhi was surprised as he hastily pulled his sword out to block. The disciples of Qingcheng started to encircle him. Yu Canghai attacked faster and faster, slashing high and low. This sixty years old man attacked with youthful agility and all of his stances were offensive. Eight Qingcheng disciples brandished their long swords and surrounded Lin Pingzhi on his horse, but they didn't go forward to slash at the horse.

When Linghu Chong saw the situation, he understood Yu Canghai's intention. The strong point of Lin Pingzhi's sword art was in its immeasurable variations and lightning fast speed. As he was on top of a horse, this strong point was greatly reduced. If he wanted to attack, he would only be able to attack the person in front of him and the horse he was riding wouldn't be able to retreat like a ghost to make people unable to grab him. The eight disciples of Qingcheng formed a sword net as they surrounded his horse to prevent Lin Pingzhi from dismounting.

Linghu Chong thought, "Qingcheng's headmaster is really not someone ordinary. This method is very formidable." Lin Pingzhi's sword art changed irregularly, and it was

fantastic. But because he was on his horse, Yu Canghai was able to match him. After looking at a few more moves, Linghu Chong's eyes shot toward Yue Lingshan. Suddenly, greatly surprised, his whole body shook.

Six Qingcheng disciples had already surrounded her and were slowly crowding her towards the edge of the river. They had split open the stomach of her horse and as the horse fell down to the ground with a long neigh, she jumped up from her horse's back. Yue Lingshan leaned to one side to dodge the incoming two attacks and stood firm. The six Qingcheng disciples exerted themselves in attacking as if their lives were at stake. Linghu Chong recognised Hou Renying and Hong Renxiong among these six people. Brandishing a sword in his left hand, Hou Renying's movements were very fierce.

Even though Yue Lingshan had learnt the five schools' sword arts engraved on the cave wall on the Cliff of Contemplation, she had not learnt the sword art of the Qingcheng School. The sword moves engraved on the cave were actually too brilliant, so she actually had not truly comprehended them. It was only her father who had taught her, and she knew the moves only. At the place of worship, she had used Taishan sword art to defeat the masters from the Taishan School, and Hengshan sword art to defeat the headmaster of the Hengshan School. This caused her opponents to be startled and she took advantage when they were intimidated. But she had no way of imitating that method to deal with these Qingcheng disciples. Linghu Chong had seen a few moves exchanged and he knew Yue Lingshan was unable to resist for long and was feeling anxious. Suddenly, he heard a long cry and saw a Qingcheng disciple had his left arm cut off by Yue Lingshan using a Hengshan sword art. Linghu Chong felt happy hoping that these six disciples would retreat in fear. But how could he have known that five of them didn't even retreat half a step, while the one with his left arm cut off crazily charged forward instead. When Yue Lingshan saw his body was soaked in



blood and his expression was terrifying, she retreated a few steps in fear. While retreating, her foot stepped on nothing and she fell down on the gravel at the edge of the river.

"Shameless, shameless!" Linghu Chong snorted.

Suddenly he heard Yingying said, "We also used this method to fight Dongfang Bubai."

He didn't know when she had arrived besides him. Linghu Chong thought what she said wasn't wrong. That day on Dark Wood Cliff, their defeat was guaranteed already, but luckily Yingying attacked Yang Lianting and disturbed Dongfang Bubai's concentration and this had enabled them to kill him. At this time, Yu Canghai was actually also using the same strategy. Of course Yu Canghai didn't know how they defeated Dongfang Bubai, but through his wisdom, he had also come to the same idea. Linghu Chong expected Lin Pingzhi to have his concentration divided when he saw his wife in danger and to turn around to save her. But he never expected Lin Pingzhi to keep fighting Yu Canghai with all his strength and unexpectedly didn't pay any attention to his wife being in danger.

After she fell down, Yue Lingshan quickly jumped up with her long sword dancing around. The six Qingcheng disciples knew Qingcheng School's survival and their own lives depended on whether they were able to kill their enemies, so they all disregarded their lives and rushed forward. The one with his arm cut off had already abandoned his long sword, and he was now rolling around on the ground trying to seize Yue Lingshan legs with his right hand. Yue Lingshan was frightened and she called out, "Brother Ping, Brother Ping, come help me!"

"Shorty Yu wants to have a look at the Evil Resisting Sword Art, so I'm letting him have a good look. Let him have a good death!" Lin Pingzhi shouted loudly as he used his wonderful moves to suppress Yu Canghai from taking a breather. Yu Canghai had already researched the stances of Evil Resisting Sword Art and he knew all the moves by heart

and decided that there was nothing special about those stances. Suddenly, at this moment, there were so many wonderful variations in the sword art and it was also done as fast as lightning making Yu Canghai roar again and again as he got more and more desperate. Yu Canghai knew his enemy's internal energy was far below his so he kept on aiming his sword towards Lin Pingzhi's long sword, hoping that Lin Pingzhi's sword would be shaken off his hand when both swords clash. But from the beginning of the fight, he had not managed to get the swords to clash yet.

Linghu Chong was angered and shouted, "You... You... You..." In the beginning, he was thinking Lin Pingzhi was being stopped by Yu Canghai from going over to help his wife. But when he heard what Lin Pingzhi said, he realised Lin Pingzhi didn't actually care about the safety of Yue Lingshan and he actually attached more importance to jesting with Yu Canghai.

At this time, the sun was fiercely shining down and Linghu Chong saw Lin Pingzhi sneering, showing his excitement and hatred. It seemed his heart was full of happiness in seeking this revenge. He was like a cat who had captured a mouse and was cruelly playing with it first before biting it to death. But when a cat plays with a mouse, it doesn't have this kind of hatred and malice.

"Brother Ping, Brother Ping, quickly come!" Yue Lingshan called out repeatedly. She shouted till her voice was hoarse as the situation became gravely desperate.

"I'm coming. Hold on for a while. I'm showing the entire set of Evil Resisting Sword Art for him to see. Originally, Shorty Yu didn't have any enmity with us, but he did all the things he did because of the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art'. So I'm going to show him the entire set of sword art and let him see it clearly, don't you think so?" Lin Pingzhi replied leisurely. It was apparent he wasn't actually directing these words to his wife, but was directing them more towards Yu Canghai. He was afraid his enemy wouldn't understand his meaning, so

he added, "Shorty Yu, don't you think so?" His body was elegant and he moved his sword gracefully. His movements were like the moves from 'The Nineteen Stances of the Jade Maiden Sword' that the female disciples of Huashan School learned. But this move Lin Pingzhi was using had a demonical aura around it.

Linghu Chong originally wanted to watch the stances of his Evil Resisting Sword Art. This was a really good opportunity to do just that as Lin Pingzhi was now revealing everything in front of Yu Canghai. But he was concerned about Yue Lingshan's safety. Even if he was certain that in the future Lin Pingzhi would use this sword art to kill him, he still couldn't look further as he heard Yue Lingshan continuously calling out for help. He couldn't take it anymore and called out, "Martial Sister Yihe, Martial Sister Yiqing, quickly go and save Miss Yue. She... she can't hold on any longer."

"We already said we won't help any party, I'm afraid it's inappropriate for us to get involved," Yihe replied.

The people of Wulin were especially fastidious about the word 'Trust'. Some characters from the unorthodox path, despite their 'no evil they won't do' attitude, once they gave their words, they wouldn't go back on it. If anyone ate his own words, then people in Wulin would despise him. Even Tian Boguang who was such a notorious rapist would abide by his words. When Linghu Chong heard what Yihe said, he knew it was the truth. Last night, besides the worship place, she already said clearly to Yu Canghai that they wouldn't be involved. If at this time they helped Yue Lingshan then it would damage the reputation of Heng-Shan School. He was still worried and quickly said, "This... This..." then he called out, "Monk No Commandment? Tian Boguang?"

"The two of them went together with Peach Valley Six Fairies last night," Qin Juan answered. "They said looking at Shorty Yu is too gloomy, so they went to drink wine. Also, the eight of them are also Heng-Shan School..."

Yingying suddenly flew out towards the edge of the river and pulled out two short swords from her waist. She loudly shouted, "Look clearly, I'm Divine Sun Moon Sect's Chief Ren's daughter, Ren Yingying. I'm not from Heng-Shan School. Six men ganging up on a girl, this really makes people uncomfortable to see. Miss Ren thinks this is unfair so I'm going to interfere."

Linghu Chong was happy to see Yingying going out to help. He let out a sigh of relief but his wound felt painful, so he sat down inside the carriage. When the six Qingcheng disciples saw Yingying coming, they unexpectedly didn't pay any attention to her but continued attacking Yue Lingshan with total disregard for their lives. Yue Lingshan retreated a few steps, and with a 'pu' sound, her left leg treaded on the river water. She wasn't accustomed to being around water, so as her foot entered the water, she became nervous and her swordplay became disorderly. Suddenly, she felt pain on her left shoulder as it was pierced by one of her enemies. That enemy with no arm took advantage of the situation and rushed forward and seized her right leg. Yue Lingshan chopped down with her long sword and struck him at his back as that armless person opened his mouth wide and bit her leg viciously. Yue Lingshan's vision darkened and she thought, "I'm going to die like this?" She then gazed at Lin Pingzhi thrusting his sword out while his left hand made a sword form sweeping across the air to make an arch. The stance he was using was really elegant, it was a sword art which really looked leisurely. She felt a wave of bitterness in her heart and felt really dizzy. Suddenly, she saw a pair of short swords in front of her and she heard two splashing sounds as two Qingcheng disciples fell into the river. Yue Lingshan fell down feeling confused and lost. Yingying waved her short swords around, and after more than ten moves, the remaining three Qingcheng disciples had all retreated after being injured and disarmed. Yingying kicked away the dying one-armed Qingcheng disciple and pulled Yue Lingshan up.

She saw Yue Lingshan's lower half of the body was soaked in the river so her skirt was all wet while her gown on top was splashed with blood all over. She immediately supported her to go up the river bank.

Lin Pingzhi called out, "Have you had a good look at my Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art?" The sword reflection flashed everywhere and surrounded a Qingcheng disciple standing besides his horse when the sword suddenly pierced that disciple between his eyes. Lin Pingzhi laughed out loud and cried out, "Fang Renzhi, you wicked thief, that death was too easy for you!" He lifted his rein and jumped over Fang Renzhi's falling body and then galloped off. Yu Canghai was already exhausted, so how could he dare to give chase?

Lin Pingzhi reined in his horse and suddenly shouted, "You're Jia Renda!" then galloped his horse over. Jia Renda had already stepped back far away some time ago, and when he saw Lin Pingzhi coming after him, he shouted and in a mad rush, turned around to run away. But Lin Pingzhi just patiently chased him, and when he caught up, he slashed his long sword and hamstringed Jia Renda's right leg. Jia Renda fell down hard on the ground. Lin Pingzhi lifted his rein and his horse stepped on Jia Renda's body. Jia Renda cried out miserably but he didn't die. Lin Pingzhi laughed maniacally and turned his horse around to trample Jia Renda's body again. After a few more passes, Jia Renda was finally quiet. Lin Pingzhi didn't give the people of Qingcheng School another glance before going besides Yue Lingshan and Yingying. He said to his wife, "Get on the horse!"

Yue Lingshan looked at him angrily. After a while, she gritted her teeth and said, "You go by yourself."

"You?"

"Why do you care?"

Lin Pingzhi took a glance at the Heng-Shan School's disciples and laughed coldly. Then he put his heels on his horse and gave its head. Yingying couldn't figure out why Lin Pingzhi was treating his newly-wedded wife so indifferently

and she couldn't help feeling surprised. Yingying said, "Madam Lin, come to my carriage to rest."

Both of Yue Lingshan's eyes were full of tears and she tried her hardest not to let her tears flow down. She chokingly said, "I'm... I'm not going. Why... Why did you save me?"

"I didn't, it was your big martial brother Linghu Chong who saved you."

Yue Lingshan felt sour in her heart and couldn't hold back her tears anymore as it flowed down her cheeks. "You... Can I please ask you for a horse?"

"Alright." Yingying turned around to lead a horse over.

Yue Lingshan stammered, "Thank you, you... you..." She jumped on the horse's back and went towards the east, opposite of where Lin Pingzhi had gone before. It seemed that she was going back to Songshan. Yu Canghai was surprised to see her galloping past, but he didn't pay her any attention. He thought, "After another night, that animal Lin will come and will kill a few of my men again. He wants to kill my disciples one by one till I'm left all by myself before he comes for me."

Linghu Chong couldn't bear seeing Yu Canghai looking like he had lost his mind, so he ordered, "Let's go!"

"Yes!" the person at the driver seat answered. With a shout, the whip was cracked and the mule started to pull the carriage forward. Linghu Chong gasped in surprise. He saw Yue Lingshan was going to the east, so his heart automatically also wanted to go with her, but he didn't expect the mule carriage would be going towards the west. His heart sank, but he didn't order the mule carriage to turn around to go to the east. He opened the screen in the carriage and couldn't see Yue Lingshan anymore. His heart was heavy as he thought, "She's been injured and she's going all by herself with no one to tend to her injuries, how's she going to fare?" Suddenly, he heard Qin Juan said, "She's

going back to Songsan to her parents. She's going to be safe there, you don't need to worry."

Linghu Chong felt relieved and replied, "Yes." While he thought, "Martial Sister Qin is very observant, she even knew what I was thinking."

At noon the next day, their party arrived at a small restaurant to eat their meals. This restaurant couldn't actually be regarded as a shop. It only consisted of a grass shed besides the main road with many long tables placed underneath, and they offered tea and meals to the passer by. When Heng-Shan School people arrived, the shop didn't have too much rice left. Luckily many people in the party were bringing rice with them as well as tools like bowl, chopsticks, and et cetera. So they immediately cooked the rice besides the grass sheds.

Linghu Chong had stayed in the carriage for a long time and it was getting stuffy in there. With the Heng-Shan School's medicine taken internally and applied externally, Linghu Chong's injury had improved by a lot. Zheng E and Qin Juan supported him to get down from the carriage and sit under the shed. He gazed towards the east and thought, "Will little martial sister come?" He then saw a cloud of dust as a group of people came from the east. They were Yu Canghai and his Qingcheng School who had come to the shed, and they also dismounted from their horses to take their meals there. Yu Canghai sat alone at a table unspeaking and with no expression on his face. He knew his life was doomed already and he didn't even bother to avoid the people of Heng-Shan School. There really is no bigger matter than death. Regardless of how the Heng-Shan School people were going to see how he would die, he didn't care about it.

Not long after, the sound of a galloping horse was heard coming from the west. The horse came slowly towards them and on top of the horse was a person wearing a flowery gown who really was Lin Pingzhi. He reined in his horse outside the shed and saw that the Qingcheng School people only gave

him a look then ignored him. Every person who was cooking was cooking his meal, while the ones drinking tea were drinking their teas. This situation was really beyond Lin Pingzhi's expectation. He laughed aloud and said, "Even if you're not going to fight, I'm still going to kill you." He jumped down from his horse and slapped the horse's buttock to let it go eat some grass. He saw there were still two empty tables underneath the shed so he went to one of them to sit.

Once Lin Pingzhi had entered the shed, Linghu Chong sniffed a strong fragrance. Linghu Chong then observed the clothes Lin Pingzhi was wearing and realised that the fragrant scent was coming from it. On Lin Pingzhi's hat was a piece of green jade, on his finger was a ruby ring, and on the tips of both of his shoes were two pearls. He was dressed just like a young master from a rich family and didn't look anything like a warrior from Wulin. Linghu Chong thought, "His family opened up the Fortune Prestige Escort House, so he was originally a young master from a rich family. He has suffered a few years of hardships in Jianghu, so after he's gotten some skills, he's enjoying all those wealth now." He then saw Lin Pingzhi taking a piece of snow white handkerchief out of his bosom and lightly dabbing his face with it. Lin Pingzhi's appearance was delicate and pretty. The way he took out his handkerchief, dabbed his face, and shook his clothes; it was just like an actor on stage playing the role of a pretty young woman.

After Lin Pingzhi had sat down, he lightly said, "Brother Linghu, you're well!"

"You're well!" Linghu Chong nodded his head.

Lin Pingzhi turned his head slightly and saw a Qingcheng disciple holding a pot of hot tea to give to Yu Canghai. "You're called Yu Renhao, aren't you? Years ago when my whole family was killed, you were there too. Even when your face is ashen, I still recognise you." Yu Renhao dropped the teapot on the table, turned around suddenly with his hand already on his sword handle, and then retreated for two steps.



"I'm Yu Renhao, what do you want?" His voice was rough, but it was trembling as he spoke and his face had turned ghostly pale.

"Ying Xiong Hao Jie, The Four Aces of Qingcheng!" Lin Pingzhi smiled. "You're number three, but there's no aura of a hero at all. This is funny, really funny."

'Ying Xiong Hao Jie, The Four Aces of Qingcheng' was Qingcheng School's four disciples with the strongest martial arts. They were Hou Renying, Hong Renxiong, Yu Renhao, and Luo Renjie. Among these people, one of them had been killed by Linghu Chong in the Huiyan Wine House, while the remaining three were present at that moment. Lin Pingzhi laughed mockingly and said, "That Brother Linghu once said: 'Dumb Bear Wild Pig, the Four Asses of Qingcheng'. That's too good for you to be compared to animals. In my opinion, hng, hng, you're even worse than animals."

Yu Renhao was afraid and angry, and his face had turned even paler, but he didn't draw his sword out in spite of this.

At this moment, the sound of galloping horses from the east was heard. Two horses seemed to be galloping quickly coming over here. When they arrived in front of the shed, the person in front reined in his horse. Everyone turned around to have a look, and some people gasped in surprise at seeing that person. The person riding in front had a short and fat stature with a humpback whose nickname was called 'Hunchback of the North' -- Mu Gaofeng. The person riding the horse at the back was unexpectedly Yue Lingshan. When Linghu Chong saw Yue Lingshan, his chest felt hot and his heart was happy. But Yue Lingshan's hands were tied behind her back, and the rein to her horse was being led along by Mu Gaofeng. It was obvious she had been captured by him.

Linghu Chong couldn't bear not doing anything and he was itching to do something. Then his mind thought, "Her husband is here, why do they need an outsider to get involved? If her husband doesn't care, then I'll think of a way to save her."

When Lin Pingzhi saw Mu Gaofeng was here, it was just like he had seen treasures falling down from the sky. He was deliriously happy. Lin Pingzhi pondered, "The people who killed my father and mother also included this humpback. I never expected such a chance circumstance to happen today and he has unexpectedly delivered himself here. The heavenly gods really have eyes." But Mu Gaofeng didn't recognise Lin Pingzhi.

That day in Hengshan at Liu Zhengfeng's house, even though the two of them had met, Lin Pingzhi was disguised as a humpback and his face was full of ointment. So compared to the beautiful and adorned youngster who was sitting there, the two characters were completely different. Later on, Mu Gaofeng found out Lin Pingzhi's humpback was fake, but he never saw his real face at all.

Mu Gaofeng turned his head around to say to Yue Lingshan, "It's very rare to have so many friends here. Let's go." When he saw the people of Heng-Shan School and Qingcheng School there, he felt quite afraid and expected there would be people who would come out to help Yue Lingshan so it would be better to remove himself from there as fast as possible. He shouted and led the horses to get out of there.

The day before, Yue Lingshan was injured and was on her way back to Mount Songshan alone to be by her father and mother. But not long into her journey, she met Mu Gaofeng. Mu Gaofeng was a narrow-minded person. He had lost to Yue Buqun when competing internal energy in the past, then the Lin Zhennan husband and wife were also rescued by Yue Buqun, so he felt disgraced and really insulted. Later on, he heard Lin Zhennan's son, Lin Pingzhi, had joined the Huashan School and took Yue Buqun's daughter as his wife, so he naturally thought the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' was also taken into the Huashan School and he got really furious because of this. When the Five Mountains School was established, he of course heard of the news. But the people

of the five mountains sword schools didn't like him and Zuo Lengchan didn't give him any invitation. So he got angry and hid nearby Mount Songshan to wait for the people of Five Mountains School as they came down the mountain. If they were in a large group, or if there was a senior, he wouldn't show himself. But if someone was alone, he was planning to vent his anger on that person. But as he observed the groups of people coming down the mountain, all of them were in groups of tens or hundreds so he couldn't do anything. So it was very convenient for him to suddenly see Yue Lingshan riding all by herself, and he immediately intercepted her.

Yue Lingshan's martial art was never as good as Mu Gaofeng. Added to that, she was injured and because Mu Gaofeng ambushed her, he had the initiative. So at the end, she was captured by him. When Mu Gaofeng heard her making threats to him saying she was Yue Buqun's daughter, he was ecstatic and a plan was quickly hatched in his head. He was going to hide her in a secret place and then exchange her with the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art'. As he was hurrying along, he didn't expect they would meet with Qingcheng and Heng-Shan Schools.

Yue Lingshan thought, "If I let him take me away now, who will rescue me then?" Without giving a thought to her shoulder injury, she slanted her body and let herself fall down from the horse's back.

"What's the matter?" Mu Gaofeng shouted and leapt off the horse. He then stooped down to grab Yue Lingshan's body from the back. Linghu Chong thought Lin Pingzhi wouldn't just stand aside on seeing his wife being insulted but would definitely go out to help her. But who would have thought Lin Pingzhi didn't care at all? Lin Pingzhi took out a folding fan with a gold-painted handle from his left sleeve and lightly fanned himself. The jade-coloured fan continuously shook. It was currently the third month and the northern snow was just beginning to melt; who would use a

fan at this time of year? But Lin Pingzhi was indeed using a fan and leisurely fanning himself.

Mu Gaofeng grabbed the back of Yue Lingshan's body and said, "Be careful falling down again." Then he lifted his hand and dropped her onto her horse's saddle. He then jumped on his horse wishing to go on their way.

"Person surnamed Mu, someone here said that your martial art is ordinary, what do you say to that?" Lin Pingzhi said.

Mu Gaofeng was startled and saw Lin Pingzhi was sitting alone at a table. He didn't seem to belong either to the Qingcheng School or the Heng-Shan School. He also couldn't tell where he came from, so he asked, "Who are you?"

"Why do you ask me? The one who said your martial art is ordinary wasn't me," Lin Pingzhi smiled.

"Who said it?"

Lin Pingzhi slammed his fan closed and pointed it at Yu Canghai. "That Priest Yu from Qingcheng School. He just saw a really wonderful swordplay, the world's number one sword art. I think it was called the Evil Resisting Sword Art."

When Mu Gaofeng heard the words 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', he was excited. He peered at Yu Canghai and saw him holding a tea cup looking absentminded as if he was hearing but wasn't listening to what Lin Pingzhi was saying. "Priest Yu, congratulations on seeing the Evil Resisting Sword Art. It's not fake?"

"Not fake!" Yu Canghai answered. "I saw it from head to tail, every move and every stance, I saw all of them already."

Mu Gaofeng was surprised and happy; he jumped down from his horse and sat at Yu Canghai's table. "I heard this sword manual was taken by Yue Buqun. How did you see it?"

"I didn't see the sword manual, I only saw a person using this sword art."

"Oh, is that so? There's real Evil Resisting Sword Art and there's fake Evil Resisting Sword Art. Fuzhou's Fortune Prestige Escort House's descendants learned the useless type

of Evil Resisting Sword Art. When people see them use it, their teeth will fall off from laughing too much. Is the one you saw real?"

"I also don't know whether it's real or fake. But the person who used this set of sword art was a descendant of the Fortune Prestige Escort House."

Mu Gaofeng laughed loudly. "You're the leader of a school but you don't know whether the sword art is real or fake. Didn't Lin Zhennan from the Fortune Prestige Escort House die under your hand?"

"Whether the Evil Resisting Sword Art is real or fake, I can't tell. Hero Mu is brilliant and have a lot of experience, you'll definitely figure it out," Yu Canghai replied.

Mu Gaofeng knew this short priest was experienced in martial art, and that he was also a first class figure in Wulin. For him to suddenly say such a thing, there must definitely be a deeper meaning to it. Mu Gaofeng giggled and swept his eyes across. He saw everyone was looking at him strangely like he had said something really wrong. "If I have a look at it, I'll definitely be able to distinguish it."

"If Hero Mu wants to have a look, there's someone here who can use that sword art," Yu Canghai replied.

Mu Gaofeng's heart shivered as if it was suddenly cold. He swept his eyes across again to look at each person. He saw Lin Pingzhi's expression was the most uncaring, so he asked, "Is this the youngster who can use it?"

"Admirable, admirable! Hero Mu really has good eyesight, just one look and you're able to figure it out," Yu Canghai said.

Mu Gaofeng observed Lin Pingzhi from head to toe, and saw his gown was gorgeous like he was a young master from a wealthy family. He thought, "The way Shorty Yu said that, there must be a plot against me. The enemy has a lot of people. A good man doesn't want to be disadvantaged so there's no need to bother with them. I'll just go with my plan. Since Yue Buqun's daughter is in my hand, I don't have to

fear him not coming to exchange the sword manual for her.” So he laughed loudly and said, “Shorty Yu, I haven’t seen you for a long time but you still love to joke around. I have some matters to do today, so forgive me for not accompanying you. Evil Resisting Sword Art is good, Killing Demon Sword Art is also good but I don’t care about it, so goodbye.”

As soon as Mu Gaofeng finished saying these words, his body shot out and landed on his horse’s back. His body was very nimble. At the same instance, people there felt there was a blur in front of their eyes looking like Lin Pingzhi had jumped out and hindered Mu Gaofeng’s horse’s path, but then they saw he was still lightly fanning himself, sitting at his table looking like he had never left it at all. Everyone was greatly astonished but Mu Gaofeng shouted and urged his horse to go. Masters like Linghu Chong, Yingying, and Yu Canghai saw clearly how Lin Pingzhi had extended his hand to stab twice and done something to the horse. Sure enough, after a few steps, Mu Gaofeng's horse suddenly ran into a pillar of the grass shed. The force with which the horse ran into the pillar was enormous and it brought half of the grass shed down. Yu Canghai leapt outside of the shed while the grass and hay fell on top of Linghu Chong, Lin Pingzhi, and other people’s heads. Zheng E extended her hand to remove the grass on Linghu Chong’s head. But Lin Pingzhi just kept on staring at Mu Gaofeng and was oblivious to anything else. Mu Gaofeng hesitated, dismounted the horse, and released the rein. That horse rushed forward a few steps and ran into a big tree. With a long neigh, it fell down on the ground with a bloody head. This horse’s movement was really strange and it became obvious both of its eyes were blinded because Lin Pingzhi had stabbed them with his unbelievably quick hand technique.

Lin Pingzhi used his fan to slowly wipe away the grass on his left shoulder. "A blind person riding a blind horse; that's very dangerous you know!"

Mu Gaofeng laughed loudly. "You, little kid, really are arrogant. You must have real skill. Shorty Yu said you know how to use the Evil Resisting Sword Art. There's no harm in letting grandpa have a look."

"Alright, I'm going to give you a look. You killed both my parents and sinned deeply just because you wanted to have a look at my family's Evil Resisting Sword Art. You're just like Yu Canghai," Lin Pingzhi replied.

Mu Gaofeng was stunned. He never expected this little master was Lin Zhennan's son. He secretly thought, "You have the nerve to openly challenge me here, so you must be feeling secure. His five mountains sword schools have become one school. These Heng-Shan School's nuns must all be his helpers." At this thought, he turned his hand around to grab Yue Lingshan and thought, "The enemy is many and I'm alone. This little girl is his wife. Once I have her under my hand, what can this little kid do?"

Suddenly, he heard the sound of the wind whistling behind him as a sword was hacked down on him. Mu Gaofeng slanted his body to dodge it, and saw Yue Lingshan was the one wielding the sword. Yingying had actually cut off the ropes tying Yue Lingshan's hands, opened up her sealed acupoints, and had also placed a long sword in her hand. After her attack was evaded by Mu Gaofeng, Yue Lingshan felt her injury flaring up again. Also, her acupoints had been sealed for a long time already so her limbs were aching. So even though she felt really angry, she didn't chase after him.

Lin Pingzhi laughed derisively. "Your reputation in Wulin is already well known for many years already, but you're actually so shameless. If you still want your life, crawl on the ground and give grandpa three kowtows while calling me 'grandpa' three times. Then I'll let you live for one year. After one year, I'll come and look for you again."

Mu Gaofeng threw his head back and laughed out loud. "Little kid, that day in Hengshan at Liu Zhengfeng's house, you disguised yourself as a little hunchback and kowtowed to

me and called me 'grandpa'. You even staked your life to become my disciple. Grandpa wasn't willing, so you joined Old Yue's school and swindled yourself a wife, isn't this right?"

Lin Pingzhi didn't answer. His eyes were filled with fires of anger, but his face was filled with excitement. He snapped his fan closed and put it on his left hand, while his right hand lifted up his gown as he stepped out of the grass shed to walk towards Mu Gaofeng. The breeze blew past and carried a sweet fragrance to everyone's nose.

Suddenly, two cries were heard. The faces of Qingcheng School's Yu Renhao and Ji Rentong changed colour, and blood was gushing out of their chests as they fell down. The people besides them couldn't help calling out in fright. They saw clearly Lin Pingzhi was going forward to deal with Mu Gaofeng, but without knowing how, he unexpectedly drew his sword and killed those two people. After he killed them, he had promptly put his sword back into its sheath. Besides Linghu Chong and a few other masters there, the other people there only felt a flicker of cold light. They didn't see clearly how he drew his sword out let alone how he used his sword to kill those two people. A thought flashed in Linghu Chong's mind, "When I first met with Tian Boguang, it was also hard for me to fight against him. But after I've learned the Dugu Nine Swords, his fast knife was no longer fast enough in my eyes. But I'm afraid Tian Boguang wouldn't even be able to take three moves from Lin Pingzhi's fast sword. And me? How many moves would I be able to take?" All of a sudden, his palms were all sweaty.

Mu Gaofeng pulled out a sword from his waist. This sword of his was really strange as it was shaped in an arch. A hunchback using a sword which also had a hunchback; so the sword was called a hunchback sword. Lin Pingzhi sneered, and walked up to him step by step. Mu Gaofeng suddenly howled like a wolf and his body rushed forward with his hunchback sword slashing an arc at Lin Pingzhi's lower



body. Lin Pingzhi's long sword left its scabbard and was thrust towards Mu Gaofeng's chest. This sword move was executed later but it arrived first and was also very fierce and accurate. Mu Gaofeng let out a roar and his body shot back out. But there was already a big rip on the chest of his cotton-padded jacket exposing his hairy black chest. Lin Pingzhi's sword only had to go two inches further forward to have cut Mu Gaofeng's chest open. The crowd cried out in astonishment.

Even though Mu Gaofeng had just escaped from his death, he was very fierce and unexpectedly didn't show any fear at all as he roared and charged towards Lin Pingzhi again. Lin Pingzhi stabbed out twice with his sword. With two 'tang, tang' sounds, he had blocked the hunchback sword twice. Lin Pingzhi laughed mockingly as his sword was getting faster and faster. Mu Gaofeng slashed high and low. The light from his hunchback sword was making up a wall of steel around his body. When Lin Pingzhi thrust out his long sword and clashed against the hunchback sword, his arm felt a burst of numbing pain. It was obvious Mu Gaofeng's internal energy was much stronger compared to his, and if he weren't careful, his long sword would be shaken out of his hand. After this, he didn't dare to attack head on anymore and he observed for a crack in Mu Gaofeng's defence before he would quickly attack that point with his sword. Mu Gaofeng didn't care what his enemy was doing and was concentrating fully on revolving his hunchback sword around his body so that not even wind nor rain could penetrate, and it unexpectedly didn't show any crack at all.

Even though Lin Pingzhi's sword art was high, he didn't know what to do. But with this kind of fighting, Lin Pingzhi was in an invincible position. Even if he couldn't harm his opponent, there was no leeway at all for Mu Gaofeng to make a mistake. Every master there saw that if Mu Gaofeng wanted to attack then his sword net would reveal a weakness, and Lin Pingzhi's quick sword would attack immediately and Mu

Gaofeng would find it impossible to block. This kind of defending oneself with a flying sword was really taxing on the user's internal energy. Each move had to be done with all your power, and only then would the movements be like unceasing flowing water covering your front and back continuously. But no matter how deep your internal energy was, you still couldn't use it forever.

Within the sword net weaved by that hunchback sword, Mu Gaofeng kept on roaring. He slashed high and low with his earth-shattering roars accompanying each sword move. Lin Pingzhi had attacked a few times thinking he was going to get through the sword net, but every time it was blocked by the hunchback sword.

Yu Canghai observed this for a long time when he suddenly saw the circle of the sword net had decreased by around half a foot. It was apparent Mu Gaofeng was gradually exhausting his internal energy. With a howl, Yu Canghai lifted his sword forward and slashed out three times at Lin Pingzhi's back. Lin Pingzhi turned his sword around to block. Mu Gaofeng's hunchback sword sliced out at Lin Pingzhi's lower body. Normally, Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng would've lost a lot of face in joining forces to attack a youth as they were both reputable seniors. But Heng-Shan School's people had all seen how violent and cruel Lin Pingzhi was in killing the Qingcheng disciples, and they had also seen how Yu Canghai wasn't his match. So at this time, when they saw the two masters joining forces, they all felt there was nothing strange about that but instead thought it was a natural thing to do. If the two of them didn't join hands, how could they fight back against Lin Pingzhi's lightning fast swordplay?

With Yu Canghai's help, Mu Gaofeng's swordplay had changed and he was now attacking as well as defending. The three of them had fought for more than twenty moves when Lin Pingzhi's left hand circled around and turned his fan's handle around to point it towards the ground. A half inch needle shot out from his fan's handle and pierced Mu

Gaofeng's right leg's 'Huantiao' acupoint. Alarmed, Mu Gaofeng quickly brandished his hunchback sword, but he suddenly felt the acupoint on his left leg was also numb. He didn't dare to move anymore and wildly brandished his hunchback sword to protect his body. Both of his legs were gradually losing strength and finally he couldn't help but to fall on his knees.

Lin Pingzhi laughed. "It's too late for you to kowtow now!" Saying this, he attacked Yu Canghai with three moves.

Even though Mu Gaofeng was kneeling on the ground, the hunchback sword in his hand didn't slow down at all as it quickly slashed and thrust. He knew he had lost so there was a sense of desperation in his fighting as he was trying to bring common ruin to his enemy. In the beginning, all his movements were defensive and there wasn't a single attacking move at all. But at this time, he was sacrificing his life and he had changed his swordplay into full attack mode without any defence at all. Yu Canghai knew he didn't have much time. If he couldn't win within a few moves and Mu Gaofeng fell down, then he would be all by himself, so his sword was now moving like a violent storm. He suddenly heard Lin Pingzhi laughing long and loud, and his vision darkened making him unable to see anything any longer. Both sides of his shoulders then felt cool as both of his arms flew off from his body.

Lin Pingzhi was laughing madly and calling out, "I'm not going to kill you! I'm going to let you run around Jianghu with no arms and no eyes. Your disciples, families, I'll kill them all and spare no one. You're only going to have enemies in this world and no family."

Yu Canghai only felt unbearable pain near where his arms were, but he understood in his heart, "What he has done to me is ten thousand times more merciless than killing me with his sword. Even though I still live, I don't have any martial art at all, and he can just humiliate me as he wants." Using Lin

Pingzhi's voice to locate him, he lifted his head to rush at Lin Pingzhi's chest.

Lin Pingzhi laughed heartily and leaned his body to dodge. Now that his hatred had been avenged, he was lost in ecstasy and wasn't being cautious anymore. He retreated for a couple of steps and arrived besides Mu Gaofeng. Mu Gaofeng swiped his hunchback sword but Lin Pingzhi blocked it with his sword. Mu Gaofeng suddenly lunged at him and hug both of his legs firmly. Lin Pingzhi was startled and then he saw dozens of Qingcheng disciples rushing at him from all directions. He struggled to free both of his legs, but he couldn't get them free from Mu Gaofeng's iron grip. He quickly stabbed his sword at Mu Gaofeng's hunchback. As his sword pierced the hunchback, a jet stream of black smelly water shot out from it. Lin Pingzhi moved his legs to jump out of the way, but he forgot both of his legs were being firmly hugged by Mu Gaofeng so his whole face was sprayed by the smelly water, and he cried out in pain. This smelly water was actually poison. Inside Mu Gaofeng's hunchback was a sack of leather concealing this poison water. Covering his face with his left hand and with both of his eyes closed, Lin Pingzhi randomly slashed and chopped at Mu Gaofeng's body with his right hand. Lin Pingzhi's attacks were done swiftly but Mu Gaofeng didn't try to avoid them as he continued to hold onto Lin Pingzhi's legs firmly.

At this time, Yu Canghai had distinguished the cries of those people and rushed to them with his mouth wide open. He managed to find Lin Pingzhi's right cheek and clamped down tightly on it. The three of them were entangled into one group and they were losing their minds. Qingcheng School disciples were using their swords to randomly chop at Lin Pingzhi's body.

Linghu Chong saw all these clearly from his carriage. In the beginning, he was startled, but when he saw Lin Pingzhi being surrounded by the Qingcheng disciples chopping with

their swords, he hastily called out, "Yingying, Yingying, quickly help him!"

Yingying shot out with the short sword in her hand. 'Tang, tang, tang', the sounds of weapons clashing rang continuously, and the disciples of Qingcheng were kept at several steps away from the entangled mess of Lin Pingzhi, Mu Gaofeng and Yu Canghai. Mu Gaofeng crazed roaring gradually died off as Lin Pingzhi's sword penetrated the back of his body again and again. Yu Canghai's whole body was bloody and he was still biting down firmly on Lin Pingzhi's cheek.

After some time, Lin Pingzhi gathered some strength in his left hand and pushed Yu Canghai away powerfully. At the same time, he cried out miserably as a chunk of flesh was torn off by Yu Canghai and blood dripped down fiercely from his right cheek. Mu Gaofeng had already died some time ago, but he was still holding both of Lin Pingzhi's legs tightly. Lin Pingzhi used his left hand to feel around to trace where Mu Gaofeng's arms were, then he raised his sword and chopped off the arms to free himself. Yingying saw the terrifying look on Lin Pingzhi's face and she couldn't help backing away from him. Qingcheng disciples crowded around their master to help him and they didn't pay any more attention to their strong archenemy.

Qingcheng disciples then suddenly wept. "Master, master!" "Master's dead, master's dead!" They lifted Yu Canghai's corpse and ran to a place somewhere further away, afraid that Lin Pingzhi would chase and kill them.

Lin Pingzhi laughed loudly and called out, "I've taken my revenge, I've taken my revenge!"

After seeing such a soul-stirring incident, Heng-Shan School disciples were startled and lost all colours from their faces. Yue Lingshan slowly walked towards Lin Pingzhi and stopped besides him. "Brother Ping, congratulations on your revenge."

Lin Pingzhi was still laughing madly and crying out, "I've taken my revenge, I've taken my revenge!"

Yue Lingshan saw him with his eyes closed tightly so she asked, "What's wrong with your eyes? Let's wash the poison first."

Lin Pingzhi was stupefied and his body swayed like he was about to fall. Yue Lingshan put her hand under his armpit to help him walk into the grass shed. Then she poured a tray of clean water on his head. Lin Pingzhi cried out miserably showing his unbearable pain. The Qingcheng disciples standing at a far away place were startled and they again ran for a few more steps.

"Little martial sister, take these medicines and give them to Martial Brother Lin. Bring him into our carriage for him to rest," Linghu Chong said.

"Many... many thanks," Yue Lingshan stammered.

"NO!" Lin Pingzhi cried out. "What's so good about being betrayed by him! Whether I'm alive or dead, what does that have to do with him?"

Linghu Chong was startled, and he thought, "When did I offend you? Why do you hate me?"

"Heng-Shan School's wonderful medicines are well known in the world, it's hard to come by..." Yue Lingshan softly said.

"Hard to come by what?" Lin Pingzhi angrily retorted.

Yue Lingshan let out a long sigh and poured another tray of clean water on his head. This time, Lin Pingzhi only snorted and gritted his teeth to stop crying out. "He's so worried about you. You've always talked well about him. Why don't you go with him? Why do you still care about me?"

When the Heng-Shan School disciples heard this, their faces lost their colours. Yihe loudly shouted, "You... You... dare to say such shameless words?"

Yiqing quickly pulled on Yihe's sleeve. "Martial sister, with his injuries, his mood isn't good. Why must you argue with him?"

"Pei!" Yihe angrily replied. "I'm just angry..."

At this time, Yue Lingshan had taken out a handkerchief and was wiping the wound on Lin Pingzhi's cheek. Lin Pingzhi suddenly pushed out forcefully with his right hand. Yue Lingshan wasn't prepared for this so she was thrown outside and hit a stone wall outside the grass shed.

Linghu Chong was greatly angered and he shouted, "You..." But he remembered the two of them were husband and wife. When husband and wife disagreed on something and fought, it was inappropriate for other people to intervene. Furthermore, from what Lin Pingzhi had just said, it was obvious there was a bit of jealousy towards him. Lin Pingzhi definitely knew about the way he intensely loved his martial sister. Also, his own injury was serious so Linghu Chong couldn't possibly get involved in this matter, so he quickly stopped from saying anything more. But the anger in him caused his whole body to tremble.

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly. "I'm shameless in what I said? Who are actually the shameless ones?" He pointed outside the grass shed and said, "That Shorty Yu, Hunchback Mu; they were the ones who wanted my Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art. They wanted to steal it and killed my father and mother for it. Even though they were ruthless and merciless, they were still gentleman enough to follow the rules of a scoundrel in Jianghu, unlike... unlike..." He then turned around and pointed to Yue Lingshan and continued, "Unlike your father, Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun, who used such a contemptible and sly method to obtain my family's sword manual."

Yue Lingshan supported herself on the wall as she slowly stood up, but when she heard Lin Pingzhi's accusation, her body shook and she sat back down. She tremblingly said, "Did... did this really happen?"

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly. "Shameless lowly people! Both of you, father and daughter, conspired very well to entice me. Huashan School's Miss Yue is married to me, a

little kid with nowhere to go with no family to return to. Why is that if it isn't for the Evil Resisting Sword Manual? Once the sword manual is in your hand, why do you still bother with me?"

Yue Lingshan gasped and cried. She said sobbing, "You... you're blaming a good person here, if I had that idea, then let me... let me be punished by heaven and earth."

"You secretly set your traitorous plan up," Lin Pingzhi said. "From the beginning, I've been kept in the dark and didn't understand a single thing. Now with both of my eyes blind, I can see everything clearly. If the two of you, father and daughter, set all these up, then why... why..."

Yue Lingshan slowly walked towards him and said, "Don't let your imagination run wild. My heart towards you is still the same as before." Lin Pingzhi snorted in contempt. Yue Lingshan went on, "Let's go back to Huashan and tend to your injuries. It doesn't matter if your eyes get better or not. If I have any ill intention behind this, then let me... let me die more miserably than Yu Canghai."

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly. "I don't know what kind of crafty idea you have for talking so nicely to me."

Yue Lingshan didn't pay anymore attention to him but she said to Yingying, "Sister, I'd like to borrow a carriage from you."

"Of course you can. Would you like to have two Heng-Shan School's sisters to accompany you on your journey?"

Yue Lingshan couldn't stop whimpering as she replied, "No... no need, many... many thanks."

Yingying pulled a carriage over and gave her the rein and whip. Yue Lingshan held onto Lin Pingzhi's arm and said, "Let's get on the carriage!" Lin Pingzhi wasn't willing, but both of his eyes couldn't see a thing and it was very hard for him to walk. After hesitating for a while, he finally went inside the carriage. Yue Lingshan bit her lip and jumped onto the driver seat. She nodded her head at Yingying to show her thanks, then cracked her whip urging the mule to draw the



carriage towards the northwest. She didn't give a glance towards Linghu Chong at all.

Linghu Chong watched the carriage disappearing into the horizon. His heart was sour and tears were about to flow down from his eyes. He thought, "Both of Martial Brother Lin's eyes are blind, and little martial sister is also injured. The two of them have no one else to rely on while slowly going on their long journey, what would be the best thing to do? If Qingcheng School's disciples chased them to take revenge, how can they fight back?" He saw the disciples of Qingcheng had surrounded Yu Canghai's corpse and then put it on a horseback before going southwesterly. Even though they went in the opposite direction to that of Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan, how would he know if they turn north after going dozens of li into their journey and go after the Lin husband and wife? As he pondered over what Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan said to each other, he felt there were still countless unsaid feelings associated with them. Even though other people wouldn't be able to see the love and hate between a husband and wife, it was clear the two of them would definitely not have a harmonious marriage. He thought little martial sister was still so young, her parents loved her so dearly, and the martial brothers in the school cherished her deeply, but to be insulted so by Lin Pingzhi, he couldn't help shedding his tears for her.

On the very same day, after they had gone for more than ten li, they rested inside the main hall of a broken down temple for the night. It was the middle of the night and Linghu Chong had been sleeping but his sleep had been interrupted by unsettling dreams for a few times already. In his sleep, he suddenly heard a soft voice calling him, "Brother Chong, Brother Chong!" Linghu Chong groaned and woke up. He then heard Yingying's voice, "Come outside, I have something to talk to you about."

Linghu Chong quickly sat up and walked outside the temple. He saw Yingying sitting on top of the stone steps

with both of her hands cupping her cheeks. She was gazing at the moon which was half covered by the cloud. Linghu Chong walked towards her and sat besides her. The night was deep and everything was peaceful. After some time, Yingying said, "You're concerned about your little martial sister?"

"Yes. There are many things which are hard to understand."

"You're worried she'll be bullied by her husband?"

Linghu Chong let out a sigh. "That's their own matter, how can other people meddle in it?"

"You're afraid the Qingcheng disciples will go after them?"

"Qingcheng disciples are pained by the loss of their master, so when they see the two of them injured, they'll want to go and harm them. That'll be a reasonable assumption."

"Why don't you think of a way to save them?"

Linghu Chong sighed. "I heard what Martial Brother Lin said. He's quite jealous of me. Even if I have good intention in helping him, I'm afraid I'll ruin the harmony between the two of them even more."

"That's one. The other apprehension you have in your heart is that I'll be unhappy, isn't that right?"

Linghu Chong nodded his head and held her left hand. Her palm was very cold. He softly said, "Yingying, you're the only person I have in this world. If a suspicion also aroused between the two of us, then what would that mean?"

Yingying slowly rested her head on his shoulder. "Since your heart already thinks like that, how can there be suspicion between us? It's not too late yet, let's go chase after them and don't let suspicion keep us away and rouse a lifelong of hatred."

Linghu Chong was startled and his eyes glazed over in fear. "Lifelong of hatred, lifelong of hatred!" He saw in his mind dozens of Qingcheng disciples surrounding the carriage Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan was riding, and dozens of

swords viciously thrusting and stabbing at it. He couldn't stop his body from trembling when thinking about it.

"I'll go wake sister Yihe and Yiqing up so you can order them to go back to Heng-Shan by themselves," Yingying said. "We'll secretly protect your little martial sister on her journey, then we'll go back to the White Cloud Convent after that."

Yihe and Yiqing saw that Linghu Chong's injury had not completely healed yet, so they were quite worried. But since his mind was already decided and he was also anxious to save his little martial sister, it wasn't appropriate for them to advise him otherwise. So they gave him a big bottle of medicine and put it in the carriage. When Linghu Chong gave the order to Yihe and Yiqing, Yingying stood on the side looking the other way. She didn't dare to look at Yihe and Yiqing, thinking they would laugh at them for going together in one carriage at night. Not until their mule-drawn carriage had gone for a few miles that she let out a sigh and the blushing on her cheeks subsided.

She recognised the way they were taking. It was a major road going northwest towards Mount Huashan and it was unlikely for them to get lost. The mule drawing their carriage was healthy and it galloped quite fast. In the calm of the night, they could only hear the rumbling of wheels and the tick-tock sound of the hooves.

Linghu Chong felt appreciative towards Yingying and he thought, "For my sake, she agrees to do anything. She knows I'm very concerned about little martial sister so she comes with me to protect her. She really knows me well. I wonder from which of my previous lives did she come from?"

Yingying hurried the mule up and it went quickly for a few miles before it slowed down again. "We'll protect your martial sister and martial brother in secret. If they meet with trouble along the way then we'll go out to help. It's best if we don't let them know. I think it'll be easier if we disguise ourselves."

"That's right. Disguise yourself as that big bearded man!"

Yingying shook her head. "That won't do. Your little martial sister already saw me in that disguise besides the place of worship."

"Then what should be our disguise?"

Yingying pointed to a farmhouse in front of them with her whip and said, "I'll go and steal some clothing. We'll change into a... a... two brother and sister from the farm." She originally wanted to say 'a couple', but as it reached the tip of her tongue, she felt it was inappropriate and immediately changed her word. Linghu Chong guessed it but knew she was very shy, so he didn't dare to make a joke about it and just smiled to himself. But Yingying was just turning her head around and caught a glimpse of his smile, and her face turned red.

"What's so funny?"

Linghu Chong smiled. "Nothing. I was just thinking, if that family doesn't have any girl, and there's only an old granny and a young kid living there, then I'd have to call you granny again."

Yingying giggled and remembered the days when she had just met Linghu Chong and he kept on calling her granny at that time. She felt warmth in her heart as she jumped down from the carriage to go towards that farmhouse. Linghu Chong saw her leaping lightly to go over the wall, followed by the sound of a dog barking. But after one bark, it became quiet again, he thought Yingying must've kicked it dizzy. After some time, he saw her coming out with some clothes in her hands. When she reached the side of the carriage, he saw that she appeared to be smiling and she had a funny expression on her face. She quickly threw the clothes into the carriage, jumped into the carriage, then started laughing loudly. Linghu Chong picked up some of the clothes and inspected them under the moonlight. They were the clothes of an old peasant and an old woman. The clothes of the old woman were particularly big, inlaid with green flower laces. It

was in an old style and clearly not the clothes of a young farm girl at all. Among the clothes, there was also a man's cap, a head cover for a woman, and a tobacco tube.

Yingying laughed. "You're Linghu the half deity! You guessed right there was a granny in the farmhouse, but it's a pity there's no kid..." She said till here when she blushed furiously and stopped talking.

Linghu Chong smiled teasingly. "So they're brother and sister. The two are really good to each other. One doesn't want to take a wife, the other doesn't want to get married, they live till seventy eighty years old and they're still together."

Yingying bit her lip smiling. "You know it's not like that."

"They're not brother and sister? That's really strange."

Yingying couldn't help laughing. Then at the back of the carriage, she put on the clothes of the old farm woman on top of her gown and she also put on the head cover on her head. Then she grabbed some dirt from the side and rubbed it on her face. After that, she helped Linghu Chong to change into the old peasant's clothes. Linghu Chong was barely a few inches away from her cheek and when he felt her breath caressing his face, he couldn't help feeling moved. He really wanted to just give her a hug and kiss her, but he knew she was extremely stern and wasn't the least bit licentious. If he offended her and raised her ire, then it would be hard to say what would happen, so he quickly collected his thought and didn't dare to move.

He suddenly looked quite strange as he was restraining himself from doing something. Yingying saw him and understood. She smiled. "Good kid, granny adores you." She extended her palm and rubbed the dirt on his face. Linghu Chong shut his eyes closed and felt her warm and soft palm lightly massaging his face all over. He felt unspeakable comfort and hoped she could continue doing this forever.

After some time, Yingying said, "Done. Your little martial will definitely not recognise you at night, but be careful not

to speak."

"Rub the dirt on my neck too."

"Who's going to look at your neck?" Yingying asked with a laugh. But she quickly understood his meaning. Linghu Chong wanted her to massage his neck. With a bent middle finger, she knocked softly on his forehead and turned around to sit on the driver's seat. With a whistle, she urged the mule forward and suddenly she couldn't help laughing, and she laughed harder as she went on. She was actually laughing till she bent forward and was finding it hard to sit.

Linghu Chong smiled and inquired, "What did you see in that farmhouse?"

"I didn't see anything funny. That grandpa and grandma are... are husband and wife..." Yingying laughed.

"So they're not brother and sister, but husband and wife instead," Linghu Chong smiled.

"You're teasing me again, I'm not talking."

"Alright, they're not husband and wife, they're brother and sister."

"Stop interrupting me, can you not? I jumped over the wall, and a dog barked, so I gave it a slap and made it faint. But the grandpa and grandma were woken up because of it. The grandma said: 'Amao must've seen a weasel coming to steal the chicken.' Grandpa said: 'Old black isn't barking anymore, it can't be a weasel.' That old grandma suddenly laughed and she said: 'I think that weasel must've followed your example from the past when you visited my home in the middle of the night. You always brought a piece of meat to give to my dog.'"

Linghu Chong smiled. "This grandma is really bad. She's scolding you and saying you're a weasel."

He knew Yingying was very shy. She was talking about the private matter between the old husband and wife farmers, so he pretended not to understand. Then, perhaps, she would continue with her story. Otherwise, if he said

something a little bit romantic, she would stop talking altogether.

Yingying laughed and continued, "That grandma was talking about the time before they got married..." She said till here when she straightened her body and lifted the rein high to urge the mule to quicken its run.

"So what happened before they got married? They must've adhered to customs really strictly. Even in the middle of the night, sitting all by themselves in a carriage, they definitely wouldn't dare to hug or kiss." Yingying snorted and stopped talking.

Linghu Chong continued, "Dear, darling, what did they say? Tell me please." Yingying smiled but kept her silence.

In the middle of the night, they only heard the hooves of the mule hitting the road and the peacefulness was really pleasing to the ear. Linghu Chong looked out and saw the moonlight was like water flowing out into the straight and broad road, and the mist enveloped the trees on the side of the road. The mule-drawn carriage slowly entered the mist and everything outside couldn't be seen clearly anymore, even the back of Yingying's body was wrapped around a haze of mist.

It was just at the beginning of spring, so the fragrance from the flowers was sometimes thick and sometimes light as the wind carried it, the pleasure of it all was unspeakable. Linghu Chong had not drunk any wine for a long time, but with this feeling in his mind, it felt just like being intoxicated. Yingying was still carrying a smile on her face as her thought went back to what those two old husband and wife were talking: The old grandpa said: 'That night I didn't have any meat at all, so I killed a chicken from your neighbour and fed it to your dog. What's that dog called?' Old grandma answered: 'Big Flower.' Old grandpa said: 'That's right, Big Flower. It ate half a chicken and didn't bark anymore. Your father, mother, all didn't know. Our Amao must've have gotten the same thing tonight.' Old grandma said: 'You knew

you're merry, and paid no attention to others' hard work. Later on, my tummy became big and father hit me viciously.' Old grandpa said: 'Lucky your stomach became big, otherwise why would your father agree to marry you to such a poor kid like me? That time, I was looking forward to your stomach getting big!' Old grandma suddenly got mad and scolded: 'You devil, so you did it deliberately and you've been hiding the truth from me. I... I won't spare you now.' Old grandpa said: 'Don't be noisy! Amao will also bear a kid. What are you noisy about?'

By that time, Yingying was afraid Linghu Chong would be worried, so she didn't listen anymore and stole the clothes before leaving a big silver ingot on the table and going out. She was going around lightly and that husband and wife didn't notice at all. It was because they were already old and slow, and they were talking excitedly, so they didn't feel her presence at all.

When Yingying thought of the conversation between the two of them, her face and ears turned red. Fortunately, it was at night, otherwise if Linghu Chong were to see her face, she would've been totally embarrassed. She stopped urging the mule and the big carriage gradually slowed down to normal speed. They turned around a bend and arrived besides the bank of a large lake. There were willows hanging around the bank of the lake and in the middle of the lake was the reflection of the round moon flickering about as the surface of the lake moved.

Yingying softly asked, "Brother Chong, are you asleep?"

"I'm asleep, I'm dreaming."

"What are you dreaming?"

"I'm dreaming I'm carrying a big piece of meat and going up the Dark Wood Cliff to feed your family dog."

"You're not a proper person. No wonder your dream is also not proper," Yingying said smiling.

The two of them sat alongside each other inside the carriage, gazing at the lake. Linghu Chong extended his right



hand and put it on the back of Yingying's left hand. Yingying's hand trembled slightly but she didn't take her hand back. Linghu Chong thought, "If only we could be like this forever and not see the bloodshed in Wulin ever again. Even if I were to become a god, I still wouldn't be as happy as right now."

"What are you thinking?" Yingying asked and Linghu Chong told her what he was just thinking of. Yingying turned over her hand and gripped his hand. "Brother Chong, I'm really happy."

"Me too."

"Even though I appreciated you commanding that group of heroes to attack Shaolin temple, I wasn't as happy as I am now. If I were your best friend, and I was trapped inside the Shaolin temple, you would've also tried to save me because of the code of righteousness of Jianghu. But right now, you only think of me, and are not thinking of your little martial sister..." As she mentioned 'your little martial sister', Linghu Chong's whole body quivered and he blurted out, "Aiyo, let's go catch up to her!"

Yingying softly said, "Only now I believe that in your heart, you finally thought of me a bit more, and thought of your little martial sister a bit less."

She lightly pulled on the rein to turn the mule around. The mule-drawn carriage returned to the major road, and with a crack of her whip, the mule ran quickly. In just a short time, they had covered more than twenty li and their mule had become weary, so it slowed down. After turning a couple of bends, they saw a field of tall sorghum in front of them with the major road running straight through the middle of it. The pale moonlight on the ground looked like a piece of big green silk spreading throughout the ground. As they gazed far away, they saw a carriage at the other end of the road, which seemed to be still and unmoving.

"This carriage looks like Martial Brother Lin's carriage," Linghu Chong remarked.

"Let's go slowly and take a look," Yingying replied. She then urged the mule to go slowly as it got nearer to the other carriage. After they had travelled for a bit, they became aware that the carriage in front was actually still moving, but very slowly. They also saw there was a person walking besides the mule, who was unexpectedly Lin Pingzhi. From the shape of the driver's body, they saw it was Yue Lingshan who was sitting on the driver's seat. Linghu Chong was surprised and he extended his hand to the rein to stop their mule. "What are they doing?" he whispered.

"Wait here, I'll go have a look," Yingying said.

If they were to catch up with the other carriage, then the other party would have discovered them. So they must use qinggong to secretly peep in on them. Linghu Chong really wanted to go with her, but his injury had not healed yet so he couldn't use his qinggong. He nodded his head and replied, "Alright."

Yingying lightly leapt off the carriage and rushed into the thicket of tall sorghum on the side of the road. The tall sorghum had grown very thick so once someone entered it, they wouldn't be seen even in the light of day. But these tall sorghum had not grown very tall yet and their leaves weren't that dense, so your head would still be exposed outside. She stooped down as she went and followed the sound of the hooves, until she was finally alongside Yue Lingshan's mule-drawn carriage.

She heard Lin Pingzhi said, "My sword manual was already taken by your father a long time ago, and I don't have any other move he doesn't know. Why must you insist on following me everywhere?"

"You've always been suspicious of my father having plans on your sword manual without any reason at all. Listen to your own conscience. When you first entered Huashan School, you didn't have any sword manual, but I've always been... always been good to you, could it be, it all means nothing to you?" Yue Lingshan reasoned.

"My Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art is well known throughout the world. Yu Canghai, Mu Gaofeng, they both couldn't find anything on my father so they searched me. How do I know you didn't deliberately treat me well because of your father's and mother's order?"

Yue Lingshan whimpered. "If you think that way, then what can I do?"

"Did I mistakenly blame you then?" Lin Pingzhi vehemently asked. "This 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual', didn't your father finally take it from my hand? Everyone knows, if you want the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' then you must take it from this little kid Lin. Yu Canghai, Mu Gaofeng, hng hng, Yue Buqun, what's the difference? The only difference is Yue Buqun succeeded, while Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng failed."

"You're slandering my father, who do you think I am?" Yue Lingshan angrily retorted. "If not for... if not for... hng hng..."

Lin Pingzhi halted his steps and shouted, "What are you going to do? If not for me being blind, injured, you're going to kill me, isn't that right? My eyes were blinded a long time ago."

"So when you first knew me and treated me well, your eyes were already blind?" She reined in the mule and stopped the carriage.

"That's right! How would I know you had planned everything? Because of this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual', you actually went to Fuzhou to open up a small wine shop. When that kid Yu from Qingcheng School bullied you, actually your martial art was much higher than him, but you pretended not to know any martial art and made me helped you. Hng, Lin Pingzhi, you were one blind stupid kid, relying on your three legged cat martial art and actually daring to be heroic and be outraged by injustice," Lin Pingzhi said. "You're everything to your father and mother, if not for something big and important, why would they agree to let you show

your face in public? Why would they agree to let you sell wine in such a humble shop?"

"Father originally sent second martial brother to go to Fuzhou," Yue Lingshan replied. "It was me who wanted to go down the mountain to play, to follow second martial brother."

"Your father controls the school's disciples so strictly. If he believed it was inappropriate, even if you kneeled and implored him for three days and three nights, he still wouldn't allow you to go. Naturally, it was because he couldn't trust second martial brother that he also sent you to watch over things."

Yue Lingshan was quiet, looking like she felt Lin Pingzhi's conjecture wasn't completely unreasonable. After a little while, she said, "You can believe me or not, but before I got to Fuzhou, I've never heard of 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. Father only said, big martial brother had beaten up the disciples of Qingcheng so there's a dislike between the two parties. At that time, the Qingcheng School was carrying out a large operation and was moving to the east. So he's afraid it would be disadvantageous to our school. That was why second martial brother and I went to Fuzhou to investigate."

Lin Pingzhi let out a sigh. It seemed he had softened up as he said, "Fine, I'll believe you this time. But I've already changed into this. Why are you still following me for? You and I are only husband and wife in names only, we're not real husband and wife. You're still a virgin, you can just go back... go back to Linghu Chong!"

When Yingying heard 'You and I are only husband and wife in names only, we're not real husband and wife. You're still a virgin', she couldn't help being surprised, and she thought, "What's the reason for that?" She immediately became bashful and her whole face turned bright red. Even her neck was feeling hot. She thought, "For me to listen to the private conversation of a husband and wife of another family is already very inappropriate, but to think of a reason for that, that's really... that's really..." She turned around to

go, but she only went for a few steps before her curiosity got the better of her and she halted to listen for more. But she was afraid of being discovered so she didn't dare to return to her previous hiding spot, and now she was further away from the two of them. However, the conversation between them could still be clearly heard by her. She heard Yue Lingshan quietly said, "After we had been married for three days, I already knew you really hate me. Even though we were in the same room, you didn't want to be on the same bed with me. Since you already hate me so, why did you... did you... marry me?"

Lin Pingzhi sighed. "I don't hate you."

"You don't hate me? Then why did you pretend to be very caring towards me during the day, but at night when we got back to our room, you didn't even want to talk to me? Father and mother have already repeatedly asked how you were treating me. I've always told them you treated me very well, very well, very well... sob..." She said till here when she suddenly bawled her eyes out.

Lin Pingzhi leapt up onto the carriage and holding both of her shoulders, he then severely said, "You said your father and mother asked you repeatedly wanting to know how I treated you, is this true?"

"Of course it's true," Yue Lingshan answered in sobs. "Why do I need to lie to you about this?"

"You know I didn't treat you well, I didn't even share the same bed with you. So how did you answer them?" Lin Pingzhi inquired.

"I was already married to you, so I belong to the Lin family. I was hoping you would have a change of feeling soon. I treated you genuinely, how can I... how can I lay out my own husband's fault?"

Lin Pingzhi gritted his teeth and did not answer her for a long time. After a long time, he slowly said, "Hng, I thought your father was worried about you so he was showing mercy towards me. Who would've thought the entire thing was

covered up by you? If you didn't answer like you did, I would've died on Mount Huashan a long time ago."

"How can that be?" Yue Lingshan sobbingly asked. "Newly married couples can be a little bit at odds with each other, how can the father-in-law kill the son-in-law just because of that?"

Yingying heard till here when she advanced forward a few more steps.

Lin Pingzhi said with hatred in his voice, "He wants to kill me not because I don't treat you well, it was because I learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art."

"I really don't understand this. These last few days, the sword art that father and you have been using is really strange, but its power is incredibly powerful. Father defeated Zuo Lengchan and snatched the Five Mountains School's headmaster position, while you killed Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng, could it be... could it be that sword art is the Evil Resisting Sword Art?"

"That's right! That really is my Fuzhou's Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art! Years ago, my great grandfather Yuantu used this seventy two groups of sword moves to intimidate the demonical and created the 'Fortune Prestige Escort House' business. All the heroes in the realm respected and feared him because of this." When he talked of this matter, his voice became louder and it was full of pride.

"But, you've never told me you've learned this set of sword art."

"How could I dare? Linghu Chong tried to snatch that Buddhist robe in Fuzhou but he couldn't do it, but this sword manual written on the Buddhist robe instead fell into your father's hand..."

"No, it can't be!" Yue Lingshan sharply interrupted. "Father said, big martial brother was the one who snatched the sword manual. I begged him to return it to you, but he wasn't willing at all." Lin Pingzhi snorted and laughed coldly.

Yue Lingshan continued, "Big martial brother's sword art is very formidable and even my father isn't his match, could it be the sword art he's using isn't the Evil Resisting Sword Art? That it wasn't learned from your family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'?"

Lin Pingzhi again laughed derisively. "Even though Linghu Chong is sly and deceitful, he's nothing compared to your father. Also, his swordplay is a mess, how can it be compared to my family's Evil Resisting Sword Art? During the fight besides the place of worship, he couldn't even compete with you and was injured heavily under your sword, hng hng, so how can his sword art be compared to my family's Evil Resisting Sword Art?"

"He deliberately let me win," Yue Lingshan quietly mumbled.

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly. "His love for you is so deep!" If these words were heard by Yingying the day before, she would've gotten enraged even though she knew already Linghu Chong deliberately lost that sword fight. But after spending the night together in the same carriage and talking clearly besides the lake, they knew each other's hearts, and she now felt sweetness in her heart instead. "He treated you really well before, but right now, he treats me much better. You can't blame him for this, it's not because he had a change of heart toward you, but it's because you've been bullying him too fiercely."

"So big martial brother's sword art isn't the Evil Resisting Sword Art," Yue Lingshan concluded. "Then why did Father always say he stole your family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'? That day when Father expelled him from the Huashan School, he declared this to be one of his big crimes. Then, I've... I've been wrongly blaming him."

Lin Pingzhi laughed mockingly. "What wrongly blaming? Linghu Chong also wanted to rob my sword manual. He had actually already stolen it. But that bandit met with the grandpa bandit, so after he got injured and fainted, your

father took it from his body and took the opportunity to lay the blame on him to cover his track. This is called thief crying thief..."

"What thief crying thief!" Yue Lingshan angrily retorted. "You're saying such a horrible thing!"

"The things your father did, aren't they horrible? The things he did, am I not allowed to say them?"

Yue Lingshan let out a sigh. "That day in Xiangyang Lane, that Buddhist Robe was stolen by the bad people from Songshan School. Big martial brother killed these two people and took the Buddhist robe back. This is not necessarily because he wanted to get it for himself. Big martial brother is a very bighearted person. Ever since he was small, he'd never been greedy and never coveted other people's things. When Father said he took your sword manual, I doubted it. But since Father said it, and I also saw how Big Martial Brother had suddenly advanced a lot in his swordplay to the level above that of my father, I believed everything was true."

Yingying thought, "You can say these words now, then Chong-lang's<sup>6</sup> love for you wasn't in vain."

Lin Pingzhi sneered coldly. "He's so good, why didn't you go with him?"

"Brother Ping, even until now, you still don't understand my heart. Big martial brother and I have grown up together since we were little. In my heart, he's just like my real brother. I love him dearly like a family member and regard him as my big brother. I've never regarded him as my lover. Ever since you came to Mount Huashan, you and I have matched really well. If I don't see you for some time, then my heart becomes unhappy and uneasy. My feeling towards you will never change."

"Your father and you are somewhat different, you're... you're like your mother." His voice had become softer as he said this; it was clear his true feeling towards Yue Lingshan was being moved. The two of them didn't speak another word



for a long time before Yue Lingshan broke the silence, "Brother Ping, you have such a deep hatred toward my father, so it won't be easy for the two of you to reconcile. I'm already married... I... I will definitely always follow you. Let's go somewhere far and find somewhere secluded to pass our days happily there."

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly and replied, "What you thought is quite good. But the whole world would've known by now that I killed Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng, so your father naturally knows that I've learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art. How can he let me keep on living in this world?"

"You said my father sought your sword manual. Based on the fact, there's nothing I can do to defend him," Yue Lingshan dejectedly said. "But you keep on saying that he's going to kill you after you've learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art. What's the logic in that? The 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' belongs to your family, so it's perfectly justified and totally natural for you to learn this sword art. There's no reason at all for my father to want to kill you, and he won't kill you just because of this."

"You can say this because you don't understand what kind of person your father is. You also don't understand what this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' really is."

"Even though I'm totally devoted to you, I still don't understand what's in your heart."

"That's right, you don't understand! You don't understand! Why do you want to understand?" He became really irritable at this point.

Yue Lingshan didn't dare to speak too much, so she said, "En, let's go!"

"Go where?"

"Wherever you want to go, I'll go with you. I'll go with you even to the edge of the world."

"What you're saying is true? No matter what happens in the future, you won't regret it?"

"I've made up my mind to be with you, to marry you. I've long ago decided to be with you forever. How can I regret it? Your eyes' injury, whether it's going to heal or not, I'll accompany you always, attend to you, and be together until both of us died."

These words were said sincerely, and Yingying was moved on hearing them. Lin Pingzhi snorted sounding like he didn't believe her. Yue Lingshan softly said, "Brother Ping, you still don't believe me. I... I... tonight I'm going to give you everything, you... so you will trust me always. Tonight will be our wedding night, and we'll become real husband and wife. From today onwards, become... real husband and wife..." Her voice became softer and softer as she spoke, at the end it was barely audible.

Yingying became terribly embarrassed, and she thought, "If I still listen to what they're doing now, how can I still be a person?" She slowly moved away while secretly scolding, "This Miss Yue really is shameless! They're in the middle of a major road, how can... how can... pei!"

Suddenly, she heard Lin Pingzhi ferociously crying out. His voice was extremely sad and shrill, followed by him shouting, "Scram! Don't come over!"

Yingying started and thought, "What's going on? Why is this Lin being so fierce?" This was followed by Yue Lingshan weeping loudly. Lin Pingzhi shouted, "Go away, go away! Quickly go far far away, I'd rather be killed by your father, I don't want you to come with me."

"You're being so mean to me... what... what did I do wrong..." Yue Lingshan cried.

"I... I..." Lin Pingzhi stammered. After a pause, he went on, "You... You..." But he stopped talking.

"Say what your heart wants to say," Yue Lingshan said. "Did I do something wrong, or maybe you're blaming my father and don't want to forgive me. Just say it clearly once and then you don't need to do anything, I'll immediately kill myself with my sword." With a hissing sound, she drew her

sword. Yingying thought, "She's going to be forced to die by Lin Pingzhi, I have to save her!" She quickly walked back and got very near to the carriage so she could rescue her.

Lin Pingzhi again stammered, "I... I..." After some time, he let out a long sigh and said, "It's not your fault, it's me who is no good."

Yue Lingshan cried mournfully. Lin Pingzhi relented and said, "Alright, I'll tell you."

"You can hit me, kill me, but don't leave me not understanding anything," Yue Lingshan said between sobs.

"Since your feeling towards me isn't fake, then I'll tell you everything so your heart can die over this."

"Why?" Yue Lingshan was perplexed.

"Why? My Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art is very famous throughout Wulin. Yu Canghai and your father are both headmasters of a school, their own sword arts are already strong, but they still planned on stealing my family's sword manual. But my father's martial art is useless, and other people can just bully and humiliate him without him being able to fight back at all, now why is that?"

"Maybe because father-in-law wasn't suitable to learn martial art, or maybe his body was weak," Yue Lingshan guessed. "From among the school's disciples in Wulin, it's not necessarily true that every one of them has strong martial art."

"You're wrong. Even though my father's swordplay was no good, it was only because he didn't study it enough. His internal energy was weak, and his attainment of the sword art was also poor. But the Evil Resisting Sword Art that he taught me, the foundation was wrong, and from the beginning to the end, it wasn't right."

Yue Lingshan hummed deeply and said, "This... This is really strange."

"Actually, it's not strange," Lin Pingzhi said. "Do you know what my great grandfather Yuantu originally was?"

"I don't know."

"He was originally a monk."

"So he was a Buddhist. Some heroes of Wulin do a lot of outrageous things in Jianghu, but when they got older, they got quite worn out from all the things happening in the world, so they become Buddhists. This can happen," Yue Lingshan said.

"No. My great grandfather didn't become a Buddhist when he got old. He was a monk first before returning to secular life again."

"There were also heroes who were monks when they're young. Our founding ancestor of the Ming, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, he was a monk before he became the emperor."

Yingying thought, "Miss Yue knows her husband is narrow-minded. Not only does she not dare to offend him, she keeps trying to reassure him."

She then heard Yue Lingshan went on, "Father-in-law must've told you that your great grandfather Yuantu was a monk when he was young."

"My father never talked about it, I don't think he knew about it. My house at the Xiangyang Lane has a Buddhist hall in it; we went in there together on that night."

"Yes."

"Why was this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' recorded on a Buddhist robe? It was because he was originally a monk, and when he saw the sword manual, he quickly wrote it down on his Buddhist robe and got out. Once he returned to secular life, he built a Buddhist hall at home and didn't dare to forget about Buddha."

"Your guess is very reasonable," Yue Lingshan agreed. "But, it's also possible that the sword manual was given to Grandfather Yuantu by an eminent reverend, and that the sword manual was originally written on the Buddhist robe. So Grandfather Yuantu may have obtained this sword manual frankly and uprightly."

"It's not like that."

"Your conjecture isn't necessarily right."

"It's not my conjecture; it's what Grandfather Yuantu wrote on the Buddhist robe."

"Ah, so that's how it is."

"He wrote this at the end of the sword manual. He was originally a monk, but because of an especially lucky chance, he heard of this sword manual from other people's mouth and wrote it down on the Buddhist robe. He warned that this sword art is too cruel and sinister, and once you learned it, you'll die without an heir. It's already unsuitable for even nuns or monks to learn as it violates the compassion of the Buddha, so for secular people, they shouldn't learn this even more."

"But he had already learned it himself."

"At that time, I also thought the same thing as you. This sword art is said to be cruel and sinister, and inadvisable to be practised, but after Grandfather Yuantu studied it, didn't he still manage to take a wife and get an heir?"

"That's right. But it could be that he took a wife and got an heir first before studying this sword art."

"It can't be," Lin Pingzhi said. "Everyone who studies martial art in this world, no matter how heroic you are, or how powerful your martial art already is, once you see this sword manual, you couldn't possibly not practice it because you want to see how the first move goes. Once you've tried the first move, you'll definitely try the second move. Once you've tried the second move, you cannot not try the third move. Even if you haven't seen a sword manual before, once you've seen it then you'll definitely go crazy about it and it's very difficult to free yourself from it, and you'll practice it from top to bottom. Even if you know there's an enormous disaster tied to practising it, you still won't care about it."

Yingying heard till here when her thoughts turned to her father. "Daddy once said, this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' actually has the same root as our sect's 'Sunflower Manual' and they have the same fundamental principle. It's no wonder Yue Buqun's and Lin Pingzhi's sword art actually

looks very similar to Dongfang Bubai's." She also thought, "Daddy said, there's something harmful in the martial art contained in the 'Sunflower Manual'. He knows that once a person who studies martial art sees the content of this martial art secret, he would definitely fall under its trap and would find it hard to free himself from it even if he knows it'd be disastrous to study it. So he simply refused to look at the Manual, which was the most sensible thing to do." A thought suddenly flashed in her mind, "Then why did he give it to Dongfang Bubai?" She thought till this point, and she automatically deduced, "So at that time Daddy already saw Dongfang Bubai harbouring an ill intention, so he gave him the Manual to harm him. But Uncle Xiang didn't know anything about this, and Dongfang Bubai was also ignorant of this and was still blissfully unworried. Actually, my father is such an astute and formidable person. How could he have been muddled headed for so long? It's just that a person's thought isn't as good as the thought of heaven. Dongfang Bubai unexpectedly struck first, captured daddy, and imprisoned him under the West Lake. But his heart wasn't especially bad. If at that time, he were to have killed daddy, or may have given an order not to give him food and drink, how could Daddy have the opportunity to take his revenge? Actually, it was a really lucky thing that we were able to kill Dongfang Bubai. If not for Chong-lang's help, Daddy, Uncle Xiang, Shangguan Yun and me, the four of us would've been killed by Dongfang Bubai at that time. Also, if it weren't for Yang Lianting messing with his heart, Dongfang Bubai would still be undefeated." She thought till here, and she couldn't help feeling that Dongfang Bubai was somewhat pitiful.

She thought, "After he captured my dad, he treated me generously and gave me a lot of gifts. When I was in the Divine Sun Moon Sect, I was no different from a princess. Today, when my own dad is the Chief, I instead, didn't have the authority I used to have. Ai, now that I already have Chong-lang, why do I still need that authority for?" As her

thoughts wandered to the past, she thought her father's scheming was very deep and she couldn't help be frightened. "Even now, Dad still hasn't told Chong-lang the method of dispersing the internal energy. Chong-lang had already amassed several different qi from other people, and they still haven't been dispersed yet. This disaster will get bigger and bigger as days go by. Sooner or later, he will definitely be in trouble. Daddy said he must join our sect and once he did, not only will he be imparted with this technique, he will immediately be sworn in as the heir to the Chief. But Chong-lang isn't willing to submit and he will be in a great deal of trouble later." She was half happy and half worried. As she quietly stood in the cluster of tall sorghum, her thoughts wildly went from here to there, but no matter what she thought about, it always returned to Linghu Chong.

At this time, Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan were also quiet. After a long time, Lin Pingzhi said, "After Grandfather Yuantu saw this sword manual, he of course practised it straight away."

"If there's really a big trouble associated with this set of sword art, it wouldn't just come out straight away," Yue Lingshan reasoned. "It's always after practising for ten years or so that the harm would come. Grandfather Yuantu must've taken a wife and gotten an heir before this trouble manifested itself."

"That's. Not. It." Lin Pingzhi stressed each word without any hesitation. After a pause, he went on, "In the beginning, I also thought the same thing as you did. But after a few days, I found out it wasn't so. My grandfather simply couldn't be Grandfather Yuantu's son. He's most likely adopted by Grandfather Yuantu. Grandfather Yuantu took a wife and got an heir merely to fool everyone."

Yue Lingshan gasped in surprise and said in a trembling voice, "Fool everyone? But... why?"

Lin Pingzhi snorted but didn't answer her. After some time, he said, "When I first saw the sword manual, I was

already very close to you. Several times, I thought I should wait till we get married and become a real husband and wife before I start studying the sword art. But it's impossible for a martial art person to resist not studying what's written in that sword manual. I finally... I finally... castrated myself to practice the sword..."

Yue Lingshan absentmindedly replied, "You... You... castrated yourself to practice sword?"

"That's right," Lin Pingzhi gloomily said. "The first sentence in the Evil Resisting Sword Manual is: 'To dominate Wulin, swipe your sword and castrate yourself'."

"Why... why?"

"To practise this Evil Resisting Sword Art, you must start with the internal energy first. If you don't castrate yourself, once you practise it, you'll immediately feel like you're on fire, fire deviate, and die."

"That's how it is." Her voice was like a mosquito and very hard to hear.

Yingying was also thinking, "So that's why!" Now, she understood everything clearly why Dongfang Bubai, who was such a masculine man with the number one martial art of the world, was wearing woman's clothes, embroidering, and was so crazy about Yang Lianting. So in order to practise this demonical martial art, he had become not a man and not a woman.

She then heard Yue Lingshan sobbed lightly and said, "Back then, Grandfather Yuantu pretended to take a wife and get an heir to fool everyone, you... you're also..."

"That's right, after I castrated myself, I still married you to fool people. But it's only to fool your father."

Yue Lingshan wept sorrowfully upon hearing this.

"I've told you everything now," Lin Pingzhi said. "You must hate me to the bone now. Why don't you go away?"

"I don't hate you," Yue Lingshan sobbed. "You were forced by circumstances and had no other alternatives. I only hate... only hate whoever wrote that 'Evil Resisting Sword



Manual' back then. Why... why did he want to harm other people like that?"

Lin Pingzhi giggled. "This senior was a eunuch."

Yue Lingshan groaned. "So... so my father... is also... is also like you..."

"Since he's studied this sword art, how can he be different? Your father is the headmaster of a school, if anyone found out he castrated himself and then spread the word out, how can he not become the laughingstock of Jianghu? That's why if he knew that I've learned this sword art, he must definitely kill me. He's already asked several times how I treated you because he wanted to know whether I've castrated myself or not. If at that time you complained even a little bit, then my life would've been gone."

"Now he knows."

"I've killed Yu Canghai, killed Mu Gaofeng," Lin Pingzhi was brimming with pride as he said this. "Within a few days, the word would've spread throughout Wulin and the whole world will know."

"In that case, I'm afraid... I'm afraid my father won't let you go then. Where should we run off to?"

"We? You already know what I am now, you still want to follow me?"

"Of course. Brother Ping, my feeling towards you will always be... always be the same. Your lot in this world is so pitiful..." She had not finished saying this when she suddenly cried out and jumped off the carriage as Lin Pingzhi pushed her out.

"I don't want your pity! Who wants your pity?" Lin Pingzhi angrily retorted. "Lin Pingzhi's swordplay is complete. I'm not scared of anything. Wait until my eyes are better. Lin Pingzhi will then rule the world. Yue Buqun, Linghu Chong, Monk Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, they are not my match."

Yingying inwardly got angry and she thought, "Wait till your eyes are better? Hng, have your eyes ever been good?" When Lin Pingzhi was injured, she originally felt quite sad for

him. But when she saw how uncaring he was towards his wife, how ruthlessly he treated her, and also how conceited he was, she couldn't help despising him.

Yue Lingshan sighed. "You must first look for a place to hide for a while. Wait till your eyes are better before doing anything else."

"I have a method to deal with your father."

"It must be horrible to hear and of course you can't say what it is. Father also doesn't need to worry about you for now."

"Hng, I understand your father way more than you do. Tomorrow, I'm going to tell the first person I see about this."

Yue Lingshan worriedly said, "Is that necessary? Aren't you..."

"Necessary? This is the method to preserve my life. I'm going to tell every person I meet. In no time at all, word would've spread to your father's ear. Then, since Yue Buqun knows it was me who said this, he cannot kill me to shut me up. On the contrary, he must protect my life."

"Your idea is really strange."

"What's so strange about it? Whether your father has castrated himself or not, no one would be able to see it. When his beard falls off, he'll glue them on and there will be people who will believe it and those who won't. But if I suddenly die without any reason, everyone will say Yue Buqun is the one who did it. This is called wishing to cover it up but exposing it more instead." Yue Lingshan sighed and didn't say anything else.

Yingying thought, "This Lin Pingzhi has a very keen mind, and his method really is formidable. Miss Yue is in a very difficult position here, she's trapped in the middle. Her parents' reputation will unavoidably be destroyed, but if she thought of a way to prevent it from happening, then it'll endanger her husband's life."

Lin Pingzhi went on, "Even if both of my eyes can't see a thing from now on, I've avenged my parents and I will never

regret it. Linghu Chong told me the last words of my father. He said there's a relic in the old residence at Xiangyang and I should never take a look at it. This was the instruction Great Grandfather left behind. Now, I've taken a look at it. Even though I violated Great Grandfather's instruction, I've taken revenge for my parents. If it weren't like this, other people would've said my Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art has an unearned reputation, and that the heads of the Fortune Prestige Escort House had been cheating people."

"Back then, both father and you suspected big martial brother. You were both saying that he took your Lin family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual', saying he fabricated Father-in-Law's last words..."

"Just say I blamed him wrongly. What do you want to do?" Lin Pingzhi interrupted. "At that time, didn't you suspect him too?"

Yue Lingshan softly sighed. "Big martial brother and you haven't known each other for a long time, so it's not surprising you suspected him. But father and me, we shouldn't have doubted him. The only person in this world who truly believed him was only mother."

Yingying thought, "Who said only your mother?"

Lin Pingzhi coldly laughed. "Your mother truly adores Linghu Chong. I don't know how many times your parents argued because of this little kid."

Astounded, Yue Lingshan asked, "My father and mother argued over big martial brother? My father and mother never argue, how do you know about this?"

Lin Pingzhi laughed coldly and answered, "Never argue? That's only to put on an appearance in front of other people. For this matter, Yue Buqun put on his hypocrite mask. I heard it all with my own ears, could it be fake?"

"I didn't say fake, but it's really strange. How come I've never heard of it, but you heard of it?"

"I'll tell you now, it's all irrelevant. That day in Fuzhou, two people from Songshan School snatched that Buddhist

robe away. These two people were killed by Linghu Chong, so naturally the Buddhist robe was taken by Linghu Chong. But at that time he was heavily injured and lost consciousness. I searched his body, but I didn't know where that Buddhist robe had gone to."

"So in Fuzhou city, you had already searched big martial brother."

"That's right, so what?"

"Nothing."

Yingying thought, "If Miss Yue follows this cunning and irritable little kid, she'll be miserable for the rest of her life." Suddenly she also thought, "I've been here for so long, Chong-lang must be worried." She tilted her ear to one side to listen but there was no noise at all, so she thought that he must be settled and everything was well.

She then heard Lin Pingzhi continued, "The Buddhist robe wasn't on Linghu Chong's body anymore, so it must've been taken by your parents. From Fuzhou till Huashan, I quietly observed things. But your father covered up really well and I didn't manage to see anything wrong at all. Your father was sick at that time. Of course, who would've known that once he's seen the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual', he immediately castrated himself to practise the sword. During the journey, there were a lot people there, so I didn't dare to peep in on your parents. Once we returned to Huashan, I hid on top of the precipice outside your parents' bedroom every night to hear their conversations and to find out where my sword manual is."

Yue Lingshan asked, "Every night you hid yourself on top of the precipice?"

"That's right."

Yue Lingshan again repeated her question, "Every night?"

Yingying couldn't hear Lin Pingzhi's answer. She thought he must've nodded his head. But she heard Yue Lingshan sighed and said, "You have a strong will."

"For vengeance, I had to succeed."

"Yes," Yue Lingshan meekly agreed.

Lin Pingzhi narrated, "I listened in for more than ten nights, but I didn't hear anything unusual. But one night, I heard your mother said: 'Martial brother, I feel there's something amiss with your appearance recently. Did you have some kind of trouble learning that Divine Art of Violet Twilight? Don't seek perfection too much and invite trouble.'

Your dad laughed and replied: 'No, my martial art practise is going smoothly.'

Your mother said: 'Don't hide it from me. How come your voice has changed recently? The pitch of your voice has become higher and sharper, just like a girl.'

Your dad said: 'Nonsense! My voice has always been like this.'

When I heard him say these words, I heard his voice was really sharp just like a girl throwing a tantrum. Your mother said: 'You're still denying it? In your whole life, you've never said those words to me. In the years we've been together, when have you concealed anything from me when something's troubling you?'

Your dad said: 'What's there to trouble me? En, the meeting at Songshan isn't too far away and Zuo Lengchan's intention to annex the four schools is very obvious. I'm troubled by this, that's some of it.'

Your mother said: 'I see that it's more than this.'

Your dad got angry again and in his sharp voice said: 'It's your blind suspicion, what else is there besides this?'

Your mother answered: 'When I say it out, don't get angry. I know you've wrongly blamed Chong'er.'

Your dad said: 'Chong'er? He and his Devil Sect people meddle together, he also has a relationship with his Devil Sect Miss Ren, everyone in the world knows about this already. How did I wrongly blame him?'"

When Yingying heard him narrating Yue Buqun's words, mentioned her own name, furthermore mentioning 'he also

has a relationship with his Devil Sect Miss Ren, everyone in the world knows about this already', her whole face slightly heated up, but a soft and tender feeling rose up from her heart. She then heard Lin Pingzhi continued, "Your mother said: 'You didn't wrongly blame him for making friends with people from the devil sect. I'm saying you wrongly blame him for stealing Ping'er's Evil Resisting Sword Manual.'

Your dad said: 'Could it be he didn't steal the sword manual? His swordplay suddenly advanced tremendously, he's even higher skilled than you or me, haven't you seen that already?'

Your mother said: 'He must've met with something else for that. I'm certain he didn't take the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. It's true that Chong'er likes to make trouble and he doesn't listen to our teachings. But ever since he was little he's always been frank, and he'd never steal anything. After Shan'er became fond of Ping'er and he was jilted, he's still such a proud person. Even if Ping'er gave him the sword manual willingly, he still wouldn't accept it.'"

Yingying heard till here and she felt an unspeakable happiness in her heart. She was hoping she could give Madam Yue a hug right then and express her gratitude. Yingying was thinking it wasn't in vain that you've raised Chong-lang since he was little; from everyone in Huashan, you are the only person who truly understands him. She also thought based on Madam Yue's words, if Linghu Chong had a chance someday, then he must repay her well for what she just said.

Lin Pingzhi went on, "Your dad snorted and said: 'It looks like you regret expelling this little kid Linghu Chong from our school.'

Your mother said: 'He violated the school's rules, and you carried out our ancestor's instructions and upheld the school's principle, so no one can criticise you for this. But your accusation of him turning over to the unorthodox path is already enough, why did you have to wrongly blame him

for stealing the sword manual too? Actually you know this much better than me. You know he didn't take Ping'er's Evil Resisting Sword Manual.'

Your dad shouted: 'How would I know? How would I know?'"

Lin Pingzhi's voice had also become high and acute imitating Yue Buqun's sharp voice in shouting angrily. In the still and calm night, a sharp cry of an owl was heard frightening Yingying. After a pause, Lin Pingzhi continued, "Your mother slowly said: 'Of course you know, because you're the one who took this sword manual.'

Your dad angrily roared: 'You... You're saying... I...' But after saying these few words, he stopped. Your mother's voice was completely tranquil as she said: 'That day when Chong'er was injured and unconscious, I stemmed his bleeding. At that time, I saw a Buddhist robe on him on which many small words were written, looking like some type of sword art. The second time I replaced his medication, that Buddhist robe had disappeared. At that time, Chong'er was still unconscious. Within that time, there was no else who had entered the room besides the two of us. And I didn't take that Buddhist robe.'"

Yue Lingshan choked and whimpered, "My dad... my dad..."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Your dad had already tried to interrupt a few times already, but after saying one or two words, he didn't say anything more. Your mother's voice gradually got softer and she said: 'Martial brother, our Huashan School's swordplay is made by our own school, and the Divine Art of Violet Twilight is an outstanding qigong to fight against other people. Our martial arts reputations have also been well spread in Jianghu, so there's no need to learn another school's swordplay. But recently, Zuo Lengchan's wild ambition has become even more fervent and he wants to annex the four schools. The Huashan School is in your hand. Whatever happens it won't be annexed by Zuo Lengchan's

hand. Let's contact Taishan, Heng-Shan, and Hengshan Schools. When the time arrives, the four schools will fight against his school, and I think we'll have a sixty percent chance of winning. If we didn't win, then we'll go out fighting and give our lives at Songshan. When we arrived at the Nine Fountains, we won't have to be ashamed in front of the Huashan School's ancestors."

Yingying heard till here and she secretly praised, "This Madam Yue really is an upper class heroine, she's much stronger in spirit compared to her husband."

Then she heard Yue Lingshan said, "My mother's words are very reasonable."

Lin Pingzhi coldly laughed and said, "But at that time your father had already taken my sword manual and had already started practising it. Why would he be willing to listen to Master-Wife's advice?" He suddenly called her 'Master-Wife', showing his true heart that he still had not lost the respect he had for Madam Yue. Then he continued, "Then your father said: 'What you said is from the point of view of a woman boasting the braveness of her husband. After we've given our lives, Huashan School will still be swallowed by Zuo Lengchan. And after we're dead, it's not necessary that we'll still have enough face to see the ancestors of Huashan School.'

Your mother didn't reply for a long time, then she sighed and said: 'If you're really anxious about this and wants to protect our school, then I won't blame you. But... But practising this Evil Resisting Sword Manual will only bring harm. Otherwise, why did the descendants of the Lin family not learn this sword art and were forced by other people till they have no way out? I advise you to stop practising it before harm comes to you.'

Your father shouted: 'How did you know I was learning the Evil Resisting Sword Art? You... You... are you spying on me?'



Your mother replied: 'Why do I need to spy when I already know?'

Your father shouted: 'Say it, say it!' He was hissing at the top of his voice. Even though his shout was really loud, he seemed to be rather discouraged.

Your mother said: 'Everyone already noticed that your voice has completely changed. Couldn't you feel it yourself?'

Your dad was still denying it: 'My voice has always been like this.'

Your mother said: 'Every morning, lots of your beard fall off inside the quilt...'

Your father sharply shouted: 'You saw it?' His voice sounded terrified.

Your mother sighed and said: 'I've seen it some time ago but I've never said anything. You can fool other people with your glued-on beard, but how can you conceal it from your wife who has shared your pillow for dozens of years already?'

Your father didn't deny it anymore seeing that everything was exposed. After a long time, he asked: 'Who else knows of this?'

Your mother answered: 'No one.'

Your father asked: 'Shan'er?'

Your mother said: 'It's unlikely that she knows.'

Your father said: 'Then Ping'er naturally doesn't know then?'

Your mother answered: 'He doesn't know.'

Your father said: 'Alright, I'll listen to your advice. This Buddhist robe, tomorrow, we'll think of a way to return it to Pingzhi, and we'll slowly think of a way to clear Linghu Chong's name. I won't study this sword art anymore starting from today.'

Your mother was jubilant and she said: 'That's for the best. But this sword art harms people, so how can we let Ping'er take a look at it? It's best to just destroy it.'"

Yue Lingshan said, "Of course father didn't agree. If he agreed to destroy this sword manual, then things wouldn't

have come to this."

"You guessed wrong. Your father said: 'Very good, I'll destroy the sword manual immediately!' I was extremely startled and wanted to say something to stop him. The sword manual belongs to my Lin family, whether it harms people or not, he has no authority to destroy it. At this time, I heard the window creaked open and I hastily pulled my head in. Then I saw a red item which was that Buddhist robe floating down, and the window was closed again. In a moment, that Buddhist robe floated besides me and I tried to grab it but it was outside my reach. At that time, I knew that whether I can avenge my parents or not depended on whether I can grab that Buddhist robe or not. So I disregarded my life and with my right hand I held onto the precipice, and I kicked out with my left feet. I felt the tip of my foot snagging the Buddhist robe and I quickly pulled it in. It was very lucky that I hooked that Buddhist robe in and it didn't disappear into that bottomless Heavenly Gorge."

Yingying was captivated listening to his narration. She thought, "The really lucky thing would be if you didn't manage to hook that Buddhist robe in."

Yue Lingshan said, "Mother knew Father had tossed that sword manual into the Heavenly Gorge. Actually, father was already familiar with that sword art and the Buddhist robe was of no use to him anymore. But because of this you managed to learn this sword art, isn't that right?"

"That's right."

"That's really Heaven's will. The gods have arranged everything and they want you to avenge father-in-law and mother-in-law. That... That... That's very good."

"But there's one matter. In the last few days, I've been racking my brains but I still don't understand. How come Zuo Lengchan also knows how to use the Evil Resisting Sword Art?" Yue Lingshan groaned and her voice was indifferent. It was obvious she didn't care if Zuo Lengchan knew how to use the Evil Resisting Sword Art or not.

Lin Pingzhi said, "You didn't learn this sword art, so you don't know its obscurity and cleverness. When Zuo Lengchan and your father fought on top of that place of worship, at the end of the fight, the two of them were using Evil Resisting Sword Art. But Zuo Lengchan's sword art was completely false, each of his move was deliberately trying to lose to your father. His swordplay foundation is already very high, every time he was in a difficult situation, he quickly changed his move to avoid it, but at the end, he was finally blinded by your father. If... en... If he used Songshan sword art, and he was defeated by your father, then there's nothing strange about that. Evil Resisting Sword Art is matchless under heaven and the Songshan sword art is a worthy opponent. Zuo Lengchan didn't castrate himself so he didn't complete his practise of Evil Resisting Sword Art; this is also not strange. What I don't understand is, where did Zuo Lengchan learn his Evil Resisting Sword Art from, why was the one he learned was pleasing to the eye but false?" His last few words were said hesitatingly, revealing that he was still thinking deeply about this.

Yingying thought, "There's nothing to be heard anymore. Zuo Lengchan's Evil Resisting Sword Art is most likely stolen from my sect. He only learned a few moves, but he didn't understand this shameless method. Dongfang Bubai's Evil Resisting Sword Art is much more formidable than Yue Buqun's. If you had seen it, even if you have three heads working together, you still wouldn't have worked it out." She was just about to quietly step back when she suddenly heard the sound of horses' hooves coming from far away. There were more than twenty horses galloping quickly through the main road coming towards them.

# **Chapter 36: Grief**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**



**Several small shoot had already grown out from Yue Lingshan's grave. Linghu Chong thought, "There are shoots already at little apprentice sister's grave now. How is she inside the grave?" Suddenly, sound of bamboo flute came from behind his back.**

Yingying was worried Linghu Chong might be in trouble so she quickly used her qinggong to go back besides her carriage. "Brother Chong, there are people coming!"

But Linghu Chong just laughed. "You're eavesdropping on other people killing chicken and feeding dog again, aren't you? Otherwise, why would you listen for so long?"

"Pei!" Yingying retorted, her face becoming hot as she thought of Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi talking about 'becoming real husband and wife' inside their carriage. "They were... they were talking about practising... practising the Evil Resisting Sword Art."

"You hesitated! There must be some other odd things. Quickly come up and tell me everything. You can't hold anything back from me."

"I'm not coming up! It's not proper."

"Why is it not proper?" Linghu Chong asked while laughing.

"I don't know!"

The sound of the horses' hooves had gotten nearer by now. Yingying said, "I think these are the surviving Qingcheng School people coming to take their revenge!"

Linghu Chong sat up. "Let's go there slowly, we still have a bit of time."

"Yes," Yingying knew Linghu Chong was very concerned about Yue Lingshan, and that he must help even though he was heavily injured. Moreover, her mind wouldn't be at ease if she left him by himself aboard the carriage while she went to help. She quickly supported him to get down from the carriage. Linghu Chong stepped onto the ground with his left foot and felt a slight pain in his wound, causing him to falter and bump the wheel of the carriage. The mule drawing the

carriage had made no sound at all so far, but as the carriage was shaken, it thought it was being urged to move so it lifted its head to neigh. Yingying's short sword flashed and the mule's head dropped to the ground cleanly cut.

"Good!" Linghu Chong lightly praised her. He wasn't actually praising her quick swordplay. With her martial art, there was nothing special for her sword to be able to cut the mule's head off in one stroke. But what was special was her quick thinking which prevented the mule from making any noise at all. As to how the carriage was going to move later and how they were going to travel, it was another matter.

Linghu Chong had walked for several steps when he heard the horses' hooves had come even nearer. He quickened his steps. Yingying pondered, "He wants to get there before the enemy so he's walking really fast, but it'll affect his wound. If I carry him, wouldn't that make him feel ashamed?" She giggled and said, "Brother Chong, I'm sorry." She didn't wait for Linghu Chong's answer but extended her right hand to grab his waist while her left hand grabbed his collar. She lifted his body up and used her qinggong to quickly go through the field of tall sorghum. Linghu Chong appreciated it but he also felt this was funny. He thought in his heart that he was the respectable headmaster of Heng-Shan School, but she was carrying him like she was carrying a baby. If someone were to see this, he would definitely lose face. But if they didn't do this, then they wouldn't be able to stay ahead of the Qingcheng School people and little martial sister would be in danger. She obviously had lifted him because she knew what he was thinking in his heart.

After Yingying had gone further forward for dozens of steps, the sound of the horses' hooves had gotten much closer. She turned her head around but all she could see in the darkness was dots of flames of the torches carried by the people on the horses. She said, "These people are really daring, they're actually carrying fire to chase them."

"They're staking their lives to carry out their strike so they don't care about anything. Aiyo, this isn't good!"

Yingying had also thought of it and she said, "Qingcheng School wants to burn the carriage."

"Let's cut them off and don't let them through."

"There's no need to worry, we'll be able to save the two of them."

Linghu Chong knew her martial art ability. Furthermore, Yu Canghai had died, and the remaining Qingcheng School people were extremely insignificant, so he didn't worry anymore. Yingying carried Linghu Chong until they were dozens of feet away from Yue Lingshan's carriage, then she helped him to sit within the field of tall sorghum. She whispered, "Sit quietly here and don't move."

Then from inside the carriage, Yue Lingshan said, "The enemy is coming quickly. They're Qingcheng School's rats."

"How do you know?" Lin Pingzhi asked.

"They're carrying torches to chase us. Hng, they really are fearless."

"Everyone's carrying a torch?"

"That's right."

Lin Pingzhi had gone through a lot of trials and tribulations so his mind was very meticulous and he was much more alert than Yue Lingshan. "Quickly get down!" He hastily said. "Those rats are going to burn the carriage!"

"Yes!" Yue Lingshan agreed. She also thought this was very reasonable. "Otherwise why are they carrying so many torches for?" She leapt down from the carriage and extended her hand to grip Lin Pingzhi's hand. Lin Pingzhi also jumped down. The two of them walked for dozens of feet to hide within the tall sorghum, and they were actually very close to where Linghu Chong and Yingying were hiding.

With thunderous sound of the hooves, Qingcheng School people arrived at the carriage. They first cut off its path before surrounding it from all sides. One of the person shouted, "Lin Pingzhi, you dog, are you trying to be a turtle?"



You still don't want to stick your head out?" They heard no sound coming from inside the carriage.

Another person said, "I'm afraid they've gone off the carriage and fled." Linghu Chong and Yingying then saw a torch arching through the darkness as it was tossed towards the carriage. Suddenly, a hand shot out from inside the carriage, grabbed the torch, and tossed it back.

The Qingcheng people made a lot of noise and shouted, "The dog is inside the carriage! The dog is inside the carriage!"

This was really beyond Linghu Chong's and Yingying's expectation. They never expected there would be another strong helper inside the carriage. But Yue Lingshan was even more surprised. Lin Pingzhi and she had been talking for so long but they never knew there was another person inside the carriage. Looking at how this person had tossed the torch back, it showed that his arm was quite strong and his martial art was quite high. The disciples of Qingcheng tossed in eight more torches, and that person tossed each one back. Even though his tosses didn't injure anyone, it stopped the remaining Qingcheng disciples from throwing anymore torches. They instead circled the carriage from far away and made a lot of noise. Under the firelight, everyone saw that it was a withered and sallow hand with blue veins sticking out. It was clearly the hand of an old person.

A person shouted, "It's not Lin Pingzhi!"

Another person shouted, "It's not his wife either."

Another person said, "That son of a turtle is afraid to come out, he's probably injured."

They hesitated for a long time and saw there was no movement in the carriage at all. Suddenly, with a cry, more than twenty of them charged forward with their swords drawn to stick them into the carriage. With a loud cracking sound, a person leapt up from the top of the carriage and a sword flickered in his hand. He flew behind the Qingcheng disciples and slashed out with his sword dropping two

Qingcheng disciples to the ground. That person was wearing a yellow gown, appearing to be a person from Songshan School. His face was covered by a piece of cloth and only his bright eyes could be seen. His sword was wonderfully quick, and within a few moves, another two Qingcheng disciples had been struck by his sword and dropped to the ground.

Linghu Chong was holding Yingying's hand, and both of them thought of the same thing, "This person is also using the Evil Resisting Sword Art."

But this person wasn't Yue Buqun, judging by the shape of his body. The two of them again thought of the same thing, "In this world, besides Yue Buqun, Lin Pingzhi, and Zuo Lengchan, there's actually a fourth person who knows how to use the Evil Resisting Sword Art."

Yue Lingshan whispered to Lin Pingzhi, "This person's sword art looks similar to yours."

Lin Pingzhi gasped in surprise and he asked, "He... He can also use my sword art? You didn't see it wrongly?"

After a time, three more Qingcheng disciples were struck down by the sword. By then, Linghu Chong and Yingying had worked out that person's sword art. Even though this person was using the sword moves from the Evil Resisting Sword Art, his speed in jumping, rushing, and retreating was way below that of Dongfang Bubai's. He was not even as good as Yue Buqun or Lin Pingzhi who could mysteriously appear and disappear. It was just that this person's martial art was high and he was far above all of the Qingcheng disciples there. Added to that, Evil Resisting Sword Art was fantastic so even though it was one against many, he still held the upper hand.

Yue Lingshan said, "His sword art looks really similar to yours but he's not as quick as you."

Lin Pingzhi sighed and replied, "If he's not fast, he doesn't know the essence of my family's sword art then. But... but, who is he? How does he know how to use this sword art?"

As the sound of battle raged on, another Qingcheng disciple was pierced by the masked person's long sword through the chest. That masked man shouted, pulled his long sword, and cut another person's waist separating him into two. The remaining Qingcheng people trembled in fear and four of them ran away. That person roared and rushed forward for two steps. From among the Qingcheng disciples, some of them cried out and turned their heads to run away. Seeing this, the remaining disciples were discouraged and they all fled. Some of them rode double, while some were in too much of a hurry to ride their horses so they sprinted away on their feet. In just a moment, they had all scattered away. That masked person was obviously quite exhausted as he propped his long sword on the ground and panted heavily. Linghu Chong and Yingying discovered from his gasps that just from fighting for a short time, this person had consumed a lot of internal energy and he had probably been injured internally as well.

At this time, there were around seven to eight torches still burning on the ground. The darkness was interspersed with light from the glinting torches. This old yellow-gowned person was gasping for breath for a long time before he lifted his long sword and slowly put it back into its sheath. Then he said, "Young Hero Lin, Madam Lin, I received Songshan's Headmaster Zuo's order to help." His voice was extremely faint and hoarse. Each word was uttered indistinctly as if he had something in his mouth or as if a part of his tongue was missing and that his voice had come out from his throat.

"Many thanks for your help," Lin Pingzhi replied. "Sir, please tell me your honorable name." As he said this, he walked out of the field of tall sorghum with Yue Lingshan.

"Headmaster Zuo learned that young hero and madam were heavily injured after dealing with traitors. So he ordered me to protect you and send the two of you to someplace safe to treat your injuries, and to make sure your father-in-law can't find you," that old person said.

Linghu Chong, Yingying, Lin Pingzhi, and Yue Lingshan all thought, "How did Zuo Lengchan know about this?"

"Headmaster Zuo and you have good intentions, I really appreciate it," Lin Pingzhi replied. "I'll be at your service once my injury is better, but I don't dare to trouble your honourable persons."

"Both of young hero's eyes were injured by Hunchback of the North's poison. Not only would it be hard to heal, this person's poison is extremely formidable and if not for Headmaster Zuo's Daogui medicine, I'm afraid... I'm afraid... it'll be hard to say what would happen to young hero's life."

After Lin Pingzhi was splashed by Mu Gaofeng's poison, both of his eyes and his whole face had been feeling extremely itchy that he felt like digging his own eyes out. But he endured it and had been restraining himself ever since, so he knew this person was saying the truth. Hesitantly he asked, "Headmaster Zuo and I aren't family or friends so why is Headmaster Zuo being so concerned about me? If you don't say this clearly, then it'll be difficult for me to follow your directions."

That old person let out a laugh. "Sharing a common hatred is just like friendship borne out of a common cause. Both of Headmaster Zuo's eyes were harmed by Yue Buqun. If we look for the source of the injuries to both of your eyes, the root of trouble was also likely to be Yue Buqun. Yue Buqun already knows that young hero has learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art, so even if young hero runs to the end of the world, he will still chase and kill you. He's now the headmaster of the Five Mountains School and his authority is as high as the heaven. How can young hero fight him all by yourself? Moreover... moreover... hey hey, Yue Buqun's own daughter is already accompanying young hero from dawn till dusk. Young hero has heavenly skill but you'll still find it hard to protect yourself from the plotting from the pillow next to you..."

Yue Lingshan suddenly shouted, "Second martial brother, so it's you!"

As she called this out, Linghu Chong's whole body shook. Hearing this old person speaking, even though his voice was vague, it sounded really familiar to him and it felt like someone he knew. When he heard Yue Lingshan's shout, he immediately recognised that person to be Lao Denuo. But Yue Lingshan had told him before that Lao Denuo was killed by someone at Fuzhou so he never thought this person could be him. Then what Yue Lingshan told him before must be false. Then he heard that old person coldly said, "Little girl is quite alert to be able to recognise my voice." He didn't use his throat to speak anymore, his voice was clear and he really was Lao Denuo.

"Second martial brother," Lin Pingzhi said, "if you pretended to be killed at Fuzhou, then... then eighth martial brother was killed by you?"

"No," Lao Denuo snorted. "Ying Bailuo is only a small kid, why do I want to kill him for?"

"You're still denying it?" Yue Lingshan shouted. "He... He... Little Lin was chopped with a sword from the back, this must be your doing too. I've always wrongly blamed big martial brother. Hng, you did good. You killed some old guy and chopped his face up, then you put your gown on the dead person so everyone thought you were killed."

"Your guess is right," Lao Denuo acknowledged. "If I didn't do that, how can Yue Buqun let me go that easily? But I wasn't the one who slashed at Young Hero Lin's back."

"Not you? Could there be another person?"

Lao Denuo coldly said, "It's not just another person, it's your father."

"Nonsense!" Yue Lingshan shouted. "You did this bad thing, but you're blaming someone else for it. There's nothing wrong with my father at all, why would he want to harm Brother Ping?"

"Because at that time, your father has already gotten the Evil Resisting Sword Manual from Linghu Chong's body. This sword manual belongs to the Lin family so the first person

Yue Buqun wanted to kill was your Brother Ping. If Lin Pingzhi lives, how can your father learn the Evil Resisting Sword Art?" Lao Denuo explained.

Yue Lingshan didn't know how to answer. In her heart, she knew those words were logical but she could never believe that her own father would plot against Lin Pingzhi. She almost said the words 'nonsense', but instead she said, "If we take that my father was the one who wanted to harm Brother Ping, how come his sword didn't kill him?"

Lin Pingzhi suddenly said, "This attack was really done by Yue Buqun. Second martial brother isn't wrong."

Yue Lingshan stammered, "You... You... You also believe this?"

"Yue Buqun chopped at my back and injured me heavily. I knew that I had no way of fighting back so I dropped to the ground and pretended that I had died. At that time, I didn't know it was Yue Buqun who plotted against me. But as I was beginning to lose consciousness, I heard eighth martial brother's voice. He called out: 'Master!' When eighth martial brother called out 'Master', he saved my life, but gave his life instead," Lin Pingzhi related.

Startled, Yue Lingshan said, "You're saying eighth martial brother was also... also... also killed by my father?"

"Of course! After I heard eighth martial brother called out 'Master', he cried out miserably. Then I lost consciousness totally and didn't know anything else," Lin Pingzhi said.

Lao Denuo continued the story, "At first, Yue Buqun wanted to give you another stab. But I was watching from the dark and I coughed lightly. Yue Buqun didn't dare to stay and quickly went back to his room. Brother Lin, my cough can be said to have saved your life."

"If... If my father really wanted to harm you, later on... later on he got many opportunities, why didn't he kill you then?" Yue Lingshan argued.

"After that I guard every step of my way so he had no other opportunity to kill me," Lin Pingzhi coldly said. "You

were actually very lucky for me. All day long we were always together, so it wasn't convenient for him to kill me."

Yue Lingshan cried and said, "So... so... you took me as your wife to fool other people, and also... also... to use me as your shield."

Lin Pingzhi ignored her and said to Lao Denuo, "Brother Lao, you're working together with Headmaster Zuo now?"

"Headmaster Zuo is my respected master. I am his third disciple."

"So you've changed school and entered Songshan."

"I didn't change school and entered Songshan. I've always been under Songshan School. It's just that I received my respected master's order to join Huashan to research on Yue Buqun's martial art, as well as to keep an eye on the movements of Huashan School."

Linghu Chong was suddenly enlightened. Before Lao Denuo joined the Huashan School, he already knew martial art and everyone in the school knew this. But his martial art was very mixed and ordinary, like the martial art around the area of Yungui. They had never suspected that he was actually a Songshan disciple. So this intention to annex the other four schools had actually been in Zuo Lengchan's heart for a very long time and he had actually planned this kind of move a long time ago. Then Lao Denuo killing Lu Dayou and stealing the Violet Twilight Secret Manual was obvious and was no longer a mystery. Even Master, who was always very vigilant towards other people, was deceived by him.

Lin Pingzhi pondered for a while then said, "In that case, Brother Lao took the Violet Twilight Secret Manual and Evil Resisting Sword Manual from Huashan back to Songshan for Headmaster Zuo to practice. Your accomplishment is really great."

Linghu Chong and Yingying were both nodding their heads. They thought, "So Zuo Lengchan and Lao Denuo are able to use the Evil Resisting Sword Art because of this. Lin Pingzhi's brain works really fast."

With deep hatred, Lao Denuo vehemently said, "I'm going to speak frankly. The two of us, together with my respected master, we've all fallen under this bastard Yue Buqun's hand. This person is really dangerous and we've all fallen into his violent scheme."

"Hey, I understand," Lin Pingzhi said. "The Evil Resisting Sword Manual you stole was an altered version by Yue Buqun. That's why Headmaster Zuo and Brother Lao's Evil Resisting Sword Art are different."

Lao Denuo gritted his teeth and said, "When I entered the Huashan School back then, Yue Buqun had already detected my deception from the outset but he didn't do anything. He just secretly paid close attention to what I was doing. When Yue Buqun wrote the Evil Resisting Sword Manual down, the sword art looks really wonderful but it was actually just good to look at and it lacked the internal energy method. He deliberately prepared this fake sword manual for me to steal so when my respected master practiced the sword art, it wasn't complete. As soon as they got into a life and death battle, he led my respected master to use this sword art so that the real sword art would be pitted against the fake sword art. By doing this, he guaranteed his own victory. Otherwise, how can the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School fall into his hand?"

Lin Pingzhi let out a sigh. "This traitor Yue Buqun really is crafty and fierce. Both of us have really fallen into his trap."

"My respected master understands this matter completely. Even though I ruined everything, he didn't blame me at all. But how can I, as his disciple, be at peace knowing this? So I'm staking my life to climb the mountain of sabres and walk through fire to kill that traitor Yue Buqun and avenge my respected master." These words were said with venom and anger by Lao Denuo. It was obvious this was a matter gnawing deeply in his heart.

Lin Pingzhi hummed. Lao Denuo went on, "Both of my respected master's eyes were harmed, so he's secretly



staying on Songshan's west peak. On the west peak, there are more than ten other people whose eyes are also bad. They were harmed by Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong. Brother Lin, come with me to see my respected master. You're Fuzhou's Lin family sole heir to the Evil Resisting Sword School, so you're the headmaster of the Evil Resisting Sword School. My respected master of course will treat you with respect. If both of your eyes can be cured then that would be best, otherwise, you can secretly hide with my respected master and together plan your revenge. How can that be not wonderful?"

These words excited Lin Pingzhi. Both of his eyes had been poisoned and he himself knew that there was no hope for a cure. All these talks of curing his eyes were only to cheat and comfort himself. Zuo Lengchan and he were both blind, they both had the same problem and the same enemy, so this was already very good. But he knew Zuo Lengchan's methods tend to be very fierce, so when Zuo Lengchan suddenly turned nice toward him, there was bound to be another plan behind this. Lin Pingzhi said, "Headmaster Zuo has a very good idea. But I don't know how I can repay him for this. Can Brother Lao please tell us more first?"

Lao Denuo laughed. "Brother Lin is an unequivocal person. Once everyone has joined forces, then everything will become clear. My master and I were duped by Yue Buqun with an incomplete sword manual. So of course I'm not resigned to it. Along the way, I saw Brother Lin's immense power and wonderfully matchless sword art in the killing of Mu Gaofeng, and the execution of Yu Canghai and the Qingcheng's clowns. They were all scattering away at the mere sight of you. It's obvious you have the real Evil Resisting Sword Art. I really admire you and really find you interesting....."

Lin Pingzhi understood his intention so he interrupted, "Brother Lao wants me to let you and your master have a look at the real Evil Resisting Sword Manual?"

"This is the Lin family's secret and outsiders mustn't peep into it. But from today onwards, we'll form an alliance in blood to kill Yue Buqun. If Brother Lin's eyes are cured, you're still young and have a lot of energy, so you wouldn't be afraid to face him by yourself. But looking at the situation today, if my respected master and I learn the Evil Resisting Sword Art, then the three of us can join hands, and only then will we have a hope of killing Yue Buqun. Brother Lin, please don't blame me," Lao Denuo said.

Lin Pingzhi was thinking in his heart: 'Both of my eyes are blind and I actually don't know how I'll be able to survive. Moreover, if I didn't promise this, then Lao Denuo will kill both him and Yue Lingshan. If Lao Denuo has spoken sincerely, then his proposal has more benefit than harm.' He replied, "I'm flattered that Headmaster Zuo and Brother Lao wish to be allied with me. My whole family has been broken up and decimated, and I'm already a handicapped person with no sight. Even though my misfortune was mainly because of Yu Canghai, Yue Buqun's plotting was also the main reason for this. So I have the same idea as you and your master to execute Yue Buqun. Once we're allies, I wouldn't dare to keep this Evil Resisting Sword Manual as a secret. I'll take it out and give it to you and your master to peruse."

Lao Denuo was exultant. "Brother Lin is very generous. My master and I are very appreciative to be able to look at the real Evil Resisting Sword Manual. From today onwards, Brother Lin will forever be our Songshan School's honoured guest. You and I will be like brothers, and we'll share everything."

"Many thanks. I'll follow Brother Lao back to Mount Songshan. After that, I'll immediately recite the real Evil Resisting Sword Manual out for you and your master."

"Recite it out?"

"That's right. Brother Lao doesn't know that the real Evil Resisting Sword Manual was actually recorded by my great grandfather Yuantu on a Buddhist robe. This Buddhist robe

was stolen by Yue Buqun so he could pry into my family's sword art. Later on, he made a mistake and this Buddhist robe fell into my hands. I was really afraid that Yue Buqun might find out so I memorised this sword manual and quickly destroyed that Buddhist robe. If I had hidden that Buddhist robe on my body, and with my worthy wife besides me, how could I still live till today?" Yue Lingshan had been staying quiet and listening from the side all this time, but when she heard him ridiculing her, she cried again. She sobbingly said, "You... You..."

Lao Denuo was already inside the carriage listening to their dialog before so he knew Lin Pingzhi was telling the truth. "That's very good, why don't we go back to Songshan together?"

"Very good," Lin Pingzhi replied.

"We must abandon the carriage and get some horses to ride through the small roads. Otherwise, if we meet Yue Buqun along the way, we won't be his match at all," Lao Denuo said. He then turned his head slightly and asked Yue Lingshan, "Little martial sister, are you going to help your father? Or are you going to help your husband?"

Yue Lingshan stopped weeping and said, "I'm not helping anyone! I'm... I'm a cruelly fated person. I'll become a nun tomorrow. I'm finished with my father and husband. I won't see any of you again from now on."

Lin Pingzhi coldly said, "It really befits you to become a nun at Heng-Shan."

Yue Lingshan angrily replied, "Lin Pingzhi, when you had nowhere to go, my father helped you. If not for him, you'd have died under Mu Gaofeng's hand and would not be still alive today. Even if you reasoned my father was rude to you, I wasn't being rude to you. What do you mean by those words?"

"What's my meaning? I want to make everything clear to Headmaster Zuo." His voice sounded very fierce. Suddenly, Yue Lingshan cried out miserably.

Linghu Chong and Yingying cried out at the same time, "Oh, no!" They immediately leapt out from the field of tall sorghum. Linghu Chong shouted, "Lin Pingzhi, don't harm little martial sister."

At this time, the two people Lao Denuo was most scared of were Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong. When he suddenly heard Linghu Chong's voice, he was startled out of his wits. He quickly grabbed Lin Pingzhi's left shoulder and jumped onto one of the Qingcheng disciples' horses. Then he put his heels to the horse and galloped away in a mad rush. Linghu Chong was worried about Yue Lingshan so he had no time to chase the enemy. He saw Yue Lingshan lay slumped on the driver's seat with a sword sticking out of her chest. He looked for her breath and found it to be slow and faint. Linghu Chong shouted, "Little martial sister, little martial sister."

"Is... Is it big martial brother?" Yue Lingshan asked faintly.

Linghu Chong happily replied, "Yes... it's me." He extended his hand to pull the sword out, but Yingying hastily stopped him. "You can't pull the sword out."

Linghu Chong saw the sword had penetrated half a foot deep into her body and it was a fatal injury. If he pulled the sword out, she would die straight away. He didn't know what to do and his heart was grieved. He started to cry and called out, "Little... little martial sister!"

"Big martial brother, it's already good that you're here with me. Brother Ping... Brother Ping, has he gone?"

Linghu Chong gritted his teeth and with tears running down his cheeks, he said, "Don't worry, I'll definitely kill him to avenge you."

"Don't, don't! His eyes are already blind. If you want to kill him, he wouldn't be able to fight back. I... I... I want to go to mom."

"Alright, I'll take you to Master-Wife." Yingying heard Yue Lingshan's voice was becoming fainter and fainter, and knew that she only had a very short time left in this world. She couldn't help shedding her tears.

"Big martial brother, you've always treated me well," Yue Lingshan said. "I... I'm sorry. I... I'm going to die."

Linghu Chong shed his tears. "You can't die, we'll think of a way to cure you."

"I'm... I'm hurt... deeply. Big martial brother, I want to ask you for something, you... you must promise me."

Linghu Chong gripped her left hand and said, "Say it, say it, I promise."

Yue Lingshan sighed. "You... you... don't agree... I've... asked too much of you..." Her voice was becoming softer and softer, and her breath becoming even weaker.

"I promise, say what you want."

"What did you say?"

"I promise, what do you want me to do? I'll do it for you."

"Big martial brother, my husband... Brother Ping... his... his... eyes are blind... he's pitiful... do you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"He's all by himself in this world. Everyone bullies him... bullies him. Big martial brother... after I die, please take good care of him, don't... don't let him be bullied..."

Linghu Chong was startled. He never expected Yue Lingshan to still hold on to the feelings she had for Lin Pingzhi when Lin Pingzhi was her violent killer. At that moment, Linghu Chong really detested Lin Pingzhi, and all he wanted to do was to chop him into thousands of pieces. In the future, it would already be almost impossible for him to spare his life, so how could he agree to look after this bastard?

Yue Lingshan slowly said, "Big martial brother, Brother Ping... Brother Ping, he didn't really want to kill me... he's afraid of my father... he wanted to gain Zuo Lengchan's trust, so... so he stabbed me first..."

Linghu Chong angrily said, "That selfish, ungrateful bastard. You... you still care for him?"

"He... he didn't deliberately try to kill me, it's just that.. it's just that his hand slipped. Big martial brother... I beg you,

beg you to look after him..."

As the moonlight reflected off her face, Linghu Chong can see her eyes were unfocused and her pupils were dull, entirely unlike her normally clear bright eyes. A few drops of blood were splashed on her cheeks, and her earnest face was begging him. Linghu Chong thought of the past ten years he had together with his little martial sister while they were at Huashan, holding hands and traveling everywhere. Sometimes when she wanted him to do something, she would show this earnest looking expression to him. No matter how difficult that thing was, even if it violated what his heart wished for, he had never refused her even once. This time, her earnest request was full of grief. She knew clearly she only had a short time left and that she didn't have another opportunity to ask Linghu Chong for anything else. This was the last and most pressing earnest request from her. All of a sudden, Linghu Chong felt his chest feeling hot and he knew if he promised her this, then not only would there be endless trouble in the future, he would even be forced to do many things that he wouldn't be willing to do. But looking at Yue Lingshan's earnest and sorrowful look, he nodded his head. "Fine, I promise you, you can put your heart at ease."

Yingying heard him and couldn't help interrupt him. "You... how can you promise that?"

Yue Lingshan tightly gripped Linghu Chong's hand. "Big martial brother, many... many... thanks... I'm... I'm at ease... at ease." Her eyes suddenly shone and the edge of her mouth smiled, looking like she was very satisfied. Linghu Chong saw her expression and thought, "Just being able to see her happy, it doesn't matter how much trouble and pain I have to go through, it's all worth it."

All of a sudden, Yue Lingshan softly sang a song. Linghu Chong felt as if his chest had just received a thump as he heard her singing a Fujian folksong. She was singing the tune, "Sisters, going up the mountain to pluck tea." This was the Fujian folksong that Lin Pingzhi had taught her. That day

on the Cliff of Contemplation, his heart hurt like it was twisted because he heard her singing this folksong. Now as she sang this song again, she was thinking of the sweet days Lin Pingzhi and she had shared while they were at Huashan. The sound of her song was becoming fainter and her grip on Linghu Chong's hand gradually loosened. She at last released her hold and slowly closed her eyes. She had stopped singing, and her breathing had also stopped. Linghu Chong's heart sank. It felt as if the whole world had also died. He wanted to cry but he couldn't. He extended both of his hands and carried Yue Lingshan's body. He softly said, "Little martial sister, little martial sister, don't be afraid! I'm going to carry you to your mom. No one will bully you anymore."

Yingying saw a red patch at the back of his body. His wound had burst open again and blood was oozing out of it. The patch of blood on his gown was getting larger and larger, but looking at the situation, she didn't know how to advise him. Linghu Chong absent-mindedly carried Yue Lingshan's body for more than ten steps while he kept on mumbling, "Little martial sister, don't be afraid, don't be afraid! I'll carry you to Master-Wife." Suddenly, both of his knees lost strength and he fell down onto the ground and lost consciousness.

When he became half aware, he heard a crisp and clear sound of a zither. The zither sound repeated itself playing a tune that sounded familiar to him and he was enjoying it immensely. His whole body felt weak and he didn't even feel like opening his eyelids. He only hoped that he could listen to the sound of the zither forever. The zither sound really didn't stop and continued playing. After listening to it for a while, Linghu Chong fell asleep again.

The second time he became conscious, the quiet and beautiful zither sound was still playing and he could also smell a fragrant scent. He slowly opened his eyes and saw all sorts of flowers in front of his eyes. Red flowers, white flowers, yellow flowers, purple flowers; they were all piled in front of

him. He wondered, "What's this place?" Hearing the zither sound repeating, he realised it was the tune Yingying often played called the 'Song of Peace and Serenity'. He turned his head around and saw the back of Yingying's body. She was sitting on the ground gently playing the zither. Gradually, he realised they were inside a cave. The sunshine entered from the mouth of the cave as he lay on a bed of soft grass. Linghu Chong wanted to sit up and as he tried, the grass underneath him made a rustling sound. The zither sound stopped abruptly and Yingying turned her head around looking very happy. She slowly walked up to Linghu Chong and sat beside him. Her eyes stayed on him for the whole time, and her face was overflowing with tender affection.

In a brief moment, Linghu Chong's heart swelled with happiness. He knew he had lost consciousness after he had seen Yue Lingshan die miserably, and Yingying had helped him into this cave. He suddenly felt a wave of sadness in his heart, but gradually, he felt unbounded warmth and tenderness coming from Yingying's eyes. The two of them affectionately sat opposite each other for a long time without saying anything.

Linghu Chong extended his left hand and lightly caressed the back of Yingying's hand. Suddenly, in the midst of the fragrance from the flowers, he smelled roasted meat in the air. Yingying took a branch full of stringed up frogs and laughingly said, "They're burnt again!"

Linghu Chong burst into laughter. The two of them were brought back to the day besides the creek when they caught some frogs and burnt them. From the first time they had eaten frogs together to this second frog feast, many things had happened in between; but the two of them were still together at the end. After having a few laughs, Linghu Chong's heartache returned and he started shedding some tears again. Yingying helped him to sit up; pointing to the mountain outside, she softly said, "Miss Yue is buried there."



Holding back his tears, Linghu Chong said, "Many... many thanks."

Yingying slowly shook her head. "There's no need to thank me. Every person has his own fate, and every person also has his own action and reward."

Linghu Chong felt apologetic. "Yingying, I can never forget the feelings I have for my little martial sister, please don't blame me."

"Of course I don't blame you. If you were just a man who likes to play around and look for girls all the time, then I wouldn't have cared about you." She then whispered, "The reason I started... I started adoring you is because you told me how much you love your little martial sister at the Bamboo Lane in Luoyang. Miss Yue was a good lady, but she wasn't... she wasn't destined to be with you. If you didn't grow up with her, and she had seen you later, she would most probably have liked you."

Linghu Chong pondered for a long time, then he shook his head. "She wouldn't. Little martial sister looked up to my master, so the man she liked must be similar to her father, a man of few words who carry himself in a stately manner. I'm only her playmate; she had never... never respected me."

Yingying said, "Maybe what you said is right. It just happened that Lin Pingzhi is similar to your master, very proper but with a belly full of secret plots."

Linghu Chong sighed. "Just before little martial sister died, she still didn't believe Lin Pingzhi truly meant to kill her and she still loved him completely. That's... that's also very good. She wasn't grieved at all before she died. I want to see her grave."

Yingying held his arm as they walked out of the cave. Linghu Chong saw the grave was made up of a pile of rocks. Even though the rocks were of uneven size, they were organised neatly. In front and at the back of the grave were fresh flowers. Seeing they were done by Yingying, he felt appreciative towards her. A cut tree trunk was erected in

front of the grave, and words were written on it with a sword-point: "Tomb of Heroine Yue Lingshan from Huashan". Linghu Chong was startled and shed more tears. He said, "Perhaps little martial sister would've liked to be called Madam Lin."

"Lin Pingzhi is such a ruthless and unrighteous person. In the netherworld, Miss Yue would have understood his wicked heart, and she wouldn't want to be called Madam Lin." While she thought in her heart, "You don't know Lin Pingzhi and she were husband and wife in name only; they're not real husband and wife."

"You're probably right," Linghu Chong agreeing with her. He then saw mountain peaks surrounding them on every side, and realized that they were inside a valley. The forests were the colour of deep green and mountain flowers grew everywhere. Birds were calling out continuously from the top of the trees. It was a very secluded and quiet place they were in.

"We'll stay here for some time to look after your injury and the grave," Yingying suggested.

Linghu Chong replied, "That's very good. Little martial sister is alone in this wilderness, even if she had become a ghost, she'll still be timid." When Yingying heard him said such a sentimental word, she couldn't help sighing.

The two of them lived in the valley comfortably, eating frogs and picking fruits. Linghu Chong only had an external injury so with Heng-Shan School's medicine applied externally and taken orally, along with his abundant internal energy, he was mostly recovered from his injury after staying there for more than twenty days. While he was recuperating, Yingying taught him how to play the zither every day. Linghu Chong was very intelligent and he concentrated fully on his practise, so he advanced very quickly. One day, he woke up early in the morning and saw several small shoots had already grown out from Yue Lingshan's grave. Linghu Chong thought, "There are shoots already at little martial sister's grave now. How is she inside the grave?"

Suddenly, the sound of a bamboo flute came from behind his back. He turned his head around and saw Yingying was sitting on a piece of rock playing the 'Song of Peace and Serenity' with a bamboo flute. He walked over to her and saw it was a new flute Yingying had made from a bamboo branch by using her sword and perforating holes through it. He took the zither, put it across his knee, and started playing, following the tune she was playing. As he gradually put his mind into playing the tune, there was no other thought in his mind. When the song was completed, he felt his vigour greatly roused. They smiled at each other.

Yingying said, "You're already familiar with this 'Song of Peace and Serenity'. Today, let's practise the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer'. What do you think?"

"That song is difficult to play, I don't know when I'll be able to play it together with you."

Yingying smiled. "This music is very profound, I also still don't understand many parts of it. There's something different with this song, it's hard to explain, but it seems if two people were to play it together, they'd be able to enlighten each other. Compared to one person fumbling around, we'll definitely advance much faster."

Linghu Chong clapped and said, "You're right! On that day, when I heard Hengshan School's martial uncle Liu and Devil... and Sun Moon Sect's Elder Qu playing this song together, the zither and the bamboo flute were in harmony, and their sound was really moving. Martial uncle Liu said that this song was originally for a zither and a bamboo flute to play together."

"You play the zither, I play the flute. We'll slowly practise it part by part."

Linghu Chong smiled. "But it's a pity it's a flute and not a se. Zither and se are very harmonious together and it would've been wonderful."[7](#)

Yingying's face turned red and she replied, "These last few days, I haven't heard you speaking any satirical remarks

and I thought you've changed. But you're still the same."

Linghu Chong made a face at her. He knew Yingying was very shy. Even though they were in a secluded valley and there were only the two of them there, she never allowed him to speak indecently. He was afraid if he jested a bit more, she would ignore him for the rest of the day so he quickly went near her to look at the music score. After listening to her explanations, he started to play his part. Playing the zither wasn't an easy matter; added to that, the song 'Smiling Proud Wanderer' was very profound with a lot of complicated changes, so this made the playing even more difficult. But Linghu Chong was bright, and he was also being directed by a master. Additionally, he had also improved a lot in his zither playing from the time he started studying it at Bamboo Lane in Luoyang since he had been practising it every chance he got. Even though it was hard for them to be harmonious in the beginning, slowly, they finally managed to play well together. Even though their playing couldn't be as wonderful as that of Liu and Qu, there was a hint of a rhythm in their playing. Within the next ten days, the two of them became very close to playing the zither and flute together harmoniously. This calm surrounding of this green valley separated them from the world, and gradually they came to forget everything about the fierce fighting in Jianghu. Both of them felt if they could spend the rest of their lives in that green valley, and not be drawn into the killings in Wulin, then they would be very happy.

One afternoon, after Linghu Chong and Yingying had been playing together for more than an hour, Linghu Chong's internal energy was suddenly disturbed and his mind not tranquil. He made a few mistakes and his heart became more worried which made his fingering method become even more chaotic. Yingying asked, "Are you tired? Rest for a while before continuing."

"I'm tired but not tired. I don't know what's wrong. I feel a bit agitated. I'm going to go pick some peaches. We'll

practise again at night."

"Alright, don't go too far."

Linghu Chong knew there were a lot of wild peach trees southeast of the valley, which would have ripened by now. He passed through the bushes and went for around eight to nine li before arriving at the grove of wild peach trees. He leapt up and picked two peaches. The second time he leapt, he picked three peaches. He saw the peaches were quite ripe and there were already a lot of peaches on the ground which had fallen from the trees. In the next few days, all the peaches might have fallen down and become rotten on the ground. He quickly picked dozens more, and he thought, "After we eat these peaches, we'll spread the seeds all over the valley. Then in a few years time, there'll be peach trees everywhere. Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

Then he suddenly thought of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, "With peach trees growing everywhere in this valley, wouldn't this be called a Peach Valley? Then will Yingying and I become the Peach Valley Two Fairies? Later on, we'll have six children, wouldn't they become Little Peach Valley Six Fairies? If those Little Peach Valley Six Fairies talk like the old Peach Valley Six Fairies, wouldn't that be troublesome?"

He was just about to laugh thinking about this when he suddenly heard a sound from somewhere far amongst the trees. Linghu Chong immediately hid himself in the tall grass. He thought, "My mouth's getting tired of eating frogs and fruits. That sound must be some kind of a beast. Yingying will be very happy if I can catch an antelope or a deer." He had not finished thinking when he heard the sound of footsteps. It was the sound of two people walking. Linghu Chong started. "How can there be people in this valley? They must've come here because of Yingying and me."

Then he heard the voice of an elder saying, "You're not wrong? Yue Buqun will definitely come here?"

Linghu Chong was even more confounded. He thought, "They're chasing my master? Who are these people?"

Another person with a low and deep voice said, "Fragrant Master Shi has already asked around. Yue Buqun's daughter and son-in-law suddenly went missing, and we couldn't find a single trace of them in any market, town, pier, or river. They must've hidden themselves in a nearby valley to look after their injuries. Sooner or later, Yue Buqun will come here to look for them."

Linghu Chong's heart ached as he thought, "So they know little martial sister was injured, but they don't know she's already dead. A lot of people must be looking for her whereabouts, especially Master and Master-Wife. If not for this valley being completely secluded, they would've searched this place a long time ago."

That elder then said, "If you didn't guess wrong, then Yue Buqun would come here sooner or later. Let's setup an ambush at the entrance of this valley."

The person with the low and deep voice said, "If Yue Buqun doesn't come, then we can lead him here after we setup the ambush."

That elder clapped twice and said, "This plan is wonderful. Brother Xue, I never thought you have so many ideas."

That person surnamed Xue replied, "Elder Ge said it well. Subordinate hopes that you'll be able to promote me. If Elder has anything for me to do, I'll do it with all my heart and power to repay Elder's kindness."

Linghu Chong felt disappointed as he thought, "So they're Yingying's subordinates from the Sun Moon Sect. It's best if they go far away from here and don't disturb Yingying and me." He also thought, "At this time, Master's martial art has advanced greatly. Even though there are many of them, they're still not Master's match. No one in Wulin is capable of matching Master's skill and intelligence. With only their intelligence, how can they even hope to ambush Master? This is called 'playing with axe in front of Lu Ban'."

Suddenly, three clapping sound was heard from somewhere far. That person surnamed Xue said, "Elder Du has also arrived."

Elder Ge also clapped for three times. The sound of footsteps was heard as four people hurried to come to them. Two of these people had very heavy footsteps and as they got nearer, Linghu Chong thought they were carrying something.

Elder Ge happily said, "Elder Du, did you capture the Yue family's little girl? You've done a great achievement."

A person laughed loudly and said, "It's from the Yue family, but it's the big girl, not the little one."

Elder Ge gasped in surprise, sounding like he was surprised and happy at the same time. "How... How... You captured Yue Buqun's wife?"

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised and he immediately wished to go out to help, but he recalled that he wasn't carrying a sword with him. With no sword in his hand, his martial art was just ordinary. This made him really worried. He then heard Elder Du said, "You're not convinced?"

Elder Ge replied, "Madam Yue's swordplay is good. How did Brother Du manage to capture her? Ah, you must've used the confusion poison."

Elder Du laughed, "This lady arrived in a restaurant absent-mindedly and just drank her bowl of tea without thinking. Other people said Yue Buqun's wife, Ning Zhongze, is great, but actually she's nothing."

Linghu Chong got angry and secretly thought, "My Master-Wife heard her beloved daughter was injured and missing, but she couldn't find her after dozens of days of searching. Of course her mind would be in chaos. This is her cherished daughter we're talking about! How can you call her nothing? I'm going to kill each one of you with my sword for insulting my Master-Wife." He then thought, "How can I snatch a sword? If no sword, then a sabre will do." Then he heard Elder Ge said, "Since we have already captured Yue

Buqun's wife, things are going well. Brother Du, the plan right now is how do we lead Yue Buqun here?"

"What do we do after we lead him here?" Elder Du questioned.

Elder Ge hesitated before saying, "We'll use this lady as hostage and force him to abandon his sword. I expect the Yue Buqun husband and wife would have deep feelings toward each other, so he wouldn't dare to defy us."

"What Brother Ge said was very reasonable. But I'm afraid if Yue Buqun's heart is very violent, and the feelings between him and his wife aren't deep, then things might get a little thorny for us," Elder Du reasoned.

"This... This... En, Brother Xue, what do you think?" Elder Ge said.

That person surnamed Xue said, "In front of two elders, it's not subordinate's place to speak out...."

He only said till here when there was another three clapping sound coming from the west. Elder Du said, "Elder Bao has arrived." In a short time, two people flew in from the west and their footsteps were really quick.

Elder Ge said, "Elder Mo has also arrived."

Linghu Chong quietly called out in misery, "Hearing their footsteps, it seems that these two people's martial arts are even higher than Du and Ge. How can I save Master-Wife with only my bare hand?" He then heard Elder Du and Ge called out together, "Brother Mo and Bao have arrived, this is really good."

Elder Ge also said, "Brother Du has done a great service by capturing Yue Buqun's wife."

An elder happily said, "Wonderful, wonderful! The two of you have worked hard."

Elder Ge said, "That's Elder Du's accomplishment."

That elder replied, "We all received Chief's order to handle this thing. No matter who did it, we'll all get a share of Chief's good fortune."



This elder's voice sounded quite familiar to Linghu Chong's ears. He thought, "Could it be that I've seen him on Dark Wood Cliff before?" He then exerted his qi to listen to their conversation, but he didn't dare stick his head out to have a look. All of the elders from the Devil Sect had high martial art, so if he moved even slightly, then he might immediately be discovered by them.

Elder Ge said, "Brother Bao and Mo, Brother Du and I were just discussing how we were going to entice Yue Buqun to come here, so that we can capture him and take him to Dark Wood Cliff."

The other elder said, "What plan did you come up with?"

Elder Ge answered, "We haven't thought of a good plan yet. Brother Bao and Mo must be able to come up with a good plan."

The first elder said, "When the five mountains sword schools were fighting at the place of worship place over the leadership, Yue Buqun blinded both of Zuo Lengchan's eyes and his power shook the entire Mount Songshan. After that, no one else from the five mountains sword schools dared to challenge him. I heard this person has obtained the real Evil Resisting Sword Art from the Lin family and he's now completely different from before. We must think of all possibilities and we mustn't look down on him."

Elder Du said, "That's right. Even if the four of us cooperate, it's still not certain if we'll be able to win against him."

Elder Mo said, "Brother Bao, you've already decided on a plan, please share it with us."

That Elder Bao said, "Even though I've thought of a plan, it's nothing wonderful. I'm afraid the three of you will laugh at it."

Elder Mo, Ge, and Du said together, "Brother Bao is our sect's brain trust. The plan you thought of must be really good."

Elder Bao said, "Actually, it's only a silly plan. We'll dig a deep pit, and cover it with grass and branches on top. Then we'll seal this lady's acupoints, put her at the edge of the pit and lead Yue Buqun to it. When he sees his wife on the ground, he'll definitely go over to help her. Then 'Boom'... he'll fall... Aiyo, not good..." He was hitting his hands together at the same time he was speaking. The other three elders and the remaining four people laughed out loud.

Elder Mo laughingly said, "Brother Bao's plan is wonderful. We'll all naturally hide ourselves on the side to wait for Yue Buqun to drop into the pit. Once he drops in, we'll cover the top of the pit with blades and don't let him leap out. Otherwise, with such strong martial art, I'm afraid he might not drop in but instead jump out of the hole."

Elder Bao hesitated and said, "But there's still some difficulty with this."

Elder Mo said, "What difficulty? Ah, that's right, Brother Bao is afraid of Yue Buqun's strange sword art. Once he fell into the hole, will we be able to stop him?"

Elder Bao said, "Brother Mo's guess is right. This time, Chief sent us to handle this thing and our enemy is the best master from the five mountains sword schools alliance. Even if we die for Chief, we'll still be highly honoured, and we wouldn't be harming the reputation of both the Divine sect and Chief's. As the saying goes: Those who thought of trivial things are not gentlemen, those who are not violent are not men. Since we're dealing with a gentleman, we must use treacherous method. I think we must add something inside the trap."

Elder Du said, "What Brother Bao said fits well with us. We're carrying a lot of 'Hundred Flowers Soul Consuming Powder'. We can spread them around the tree branches and grass covering the hole. When Yue Buqun falls into the hole, he'll suck in a breath of this powder..." He said till here, when they all burst into laughter.

Elder Bao said, "We can't be late, we must begin now. Where's the best place to lay this trap?"

Elder Ge replied, "Three li west from here, there's a towering cliff on one side with a deep abyss on the other side. There's only a small road you can walk through there. If Yue Buqun doesn't come then we'll just forget it, on the other hand, if he comes then he'll definitely have to go through this small road."

Elder Bao said, "Very good, let's go there and take a look." After he said this, he started walking while the rest followed behind him.

Linghu Chong thought, "They wouldn't be able to dig this trap in just an hour. I'll go quickly tell Yingying about this and get myself a long sword, then I'll go and rescue Master-Wife." He waited until all the Devil Sect's people had gone before quietly going back.

After walking for a few li, he suddenly heard the sound of people digging. He thought, "How come they're digging here?" Linghu Chong quickly hid himself behind a tree. When he poked his head out to take a look, he saw four Devil Sect's people digging with their bodies bent over while a few elders were standing by the side. He was quite near to them this time and was able to see the profile of one of the elders. He secretly shivered in fear. "This person is actually the one called Bao Dachu who I saw in Hangzhou's Mount Gu at the Plum Manor. So Elder Bao is actually Bao Dachu. Back then when Ren Woxing escaped from the West Lake, the first Devil Sect's elder he took back was this Bao Dachu."

Linghu Chong had seen him deal with Mr. Huang Zhong before so he knew Bao Dachu's martial art was high. In his heart, he was thinking that Master had just taken up the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School, so he must have made some trouble for the Devil Sect. The Devil Sect wouldn't just stay quietly and let this happen, so Ren Woxing sent some people out to retaliate. So Linghu Chong was thinking there would be more than just these four elders

who had been sent. He saw that the four people were using a pair of halberds and hatchets to loosen the ground and dig out the dirt. Linghu Chong thought, "They did say they wanted to dig the hole by that cliff, but how come they're digging here?" Then he realized, "It's rocky beside the cliff, so how can it be easy to dig a hole there? This Elder Ge is a stupid person, speaking blindly without thinking first." With the Devil Sect people digging a hole here, his way back was blocked and he was prevented from getting a sword. He thought it was very inappropriate to dig a hole with weapons and reasoned they were unlikely to finish digging the hole any time soon. But he didn't want to go around them to get a sword because he didn't dare to be too far away from his Master-Wife.

Suddenly, Elder Ge laughed and said, "Yue Buqun is already old, but his wife is still so young and pretty."

Elder Du laughingly said, "She looks good, but she's not that young. She looks to be in her early forties. If Brother Ge is interested, wait until we capture Yue Buqun and report back to Chief. Then you can ask for this lady, what do you think?"

Elder Ge laughed. "I wouldn't dare to ask for her. But there's no harm in playing with her."

Linghu Chong was furious. "Shameless bastard, you got some nerve to insult my Master-Wife. Wait until I give every single one of you a horrible death." Linghu Chong couldn't endure Elder Ge's licentious laughing so he stuck his head out to take a look. He saw Elder Ge was giving Madam Yue's cheek a pinch. Madam Yue's acupoint was sealed so she couldn't fight back nor even utter a sound. The Devil Sect people all laughed merrily over this.

Elder Du laughingly said, "Brother Ge is so wary, you don't dare to play with this lady here?"

Linghu Chong was livid. If this Elder Ge really became rude toward his Master-Wife, then he would come out and

stake his life with these Devil Sect people despite having no sword in his hand. But he heard Elder Ge laughing lewdly and said, "It's not that I don't dare to play with her, but I'm afraid I might spoil Chief's mission, and then even if I have a hundred heads, they might not be enough to be beheaded."

"That's the best," Elder Bao coldly said. "Brother Ge, Brother Du, both of you have good qinggong. Lead Yue Buqun to come here. I predict in two hours, everything will be in place here." Elder Ge and Du acknowledged together, "Yes!" Then they went toward the north.

After the two of them were gone, only the sound of digging was heard in that empty valley with the occasional instructions from Elder Mo. Linghu Chong hid in the underbrush and didn't even dare to take a deep breath. He thought, "I've been gone for so long, Yingying must surely be worried and she'll definitely come out to look for me. When she hears this digging sound, she'll come over to take a look and then she can help my Master-Wife. Once these Devil Sect's elders saw Young Lady Ren, how would they dare to disobey her? Considering Chief Ren, Brother Xiang and Yingying's face, I shouldn't fight with the people from the Devil Sect. That would be the best way." Thinking till here, he felt that the longer he waited the better it would be. That pervert Elder Ge had been gone for quite some time so Master-Wife didn't have to bear with his insult anymore.

At last, the Devil Sect people finished digging and put the branches on top of the trap. They then scattered the confusion poison on top and further added grass on top of it. Bao Dachu and the other five people separately hid themselves around the trap to patiently wait for Yue Buqun's arrival.

Linghu Chong quietly picked up a big rock with his hand and thought, "I'll wait till Master come. As soon as he comes near the trap, I'll throw this rock onto the trap. Once the rock falls into the trap, Master will see it and he'll be vigilant."

At this time, it was only the beginning of summer. The sound of cicadas sang throughout the dell, and occasionally cries of little birds were heard. Besides those sounds, nothing else was heard. Linghu Chong kept his breathing slow and light, while straining to listen to Yue Buqun and the two elders' footsteps.

After more than an hour, he suddenly heard a female voice crying out from a far away place. It was Yingying's voice. Linghu Chong thought, "Yingying has discovered there are outsiders here. I wonder who she saw, my master or those two elders?"

Then he heard the footsteps of two people coming; one was in front of the other as they rushed forward. He heard Yingying continuously calling out, "Brother Chong, Brother Chong, your master is here to kill you. You mustn't come out."

Linghu Chong was startled. "Master is here to kill me?"

Then he heard Yingying calling out again, "Brother Chong, quickly go. Your master wants to kill you." She was using all of her energy to shout, it was obvious she wanted Linghu Chong to hear her from far away.

Yingying was calling out, her hair loose, and running quickly with a sword in her hand while Yue Buqun was behind her with nothing in either of his hands. Yingying was now only around ten steps away from falling into the trap, while Linghu Chong and Bao Dachu were anxious, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, Yue Buqun shot out and grabbed Yingying's back with his left hand while his right hand quickly grabbed both of her wrists and twisted her arms behind her back. In just a short moment, Yingying was rendered motionless. Her hand loosened and the long sword dropped onto the ground. Linghu Chong and Bao Dachu were too late to save her because Yue Buqun moved incredibly fast. Yingying's martial art was also very high but she unexpectedly couldn't run away, and in just one move, she was captured by him. Linghu Chong was alarmed and he

nearly called out. Throughout all this, Yingying was still calling out, "Brother Chong quickly go away. Your master wants to kill you!" Hot tears bubbled up in Linghu Chong's eyes as he thought, "She cares so much about me that she ignored her own safety."

Freeing his left hand, Yue Buqun sealed the acupoints on Yingying's back. Then his right hand released her and she dropped to the ground. Just then, he saw Madam Yue was lying still on the ground. Yue Buqun was surprised, but he was immediately on alert that there must be danger nearby. He didn't approach his wife but calmly looked around. He saw nothing strange and so lightly said, "Young Lady Ren, that thief Linghu Chong killed my beloved daughter. Were you a part of this too?"

Linghu Chong was again surprised. He thought, "Master said that I killed little martial sister. Where did he hear this from?"

"Your daughter was killed by Lin Pingzhi," Yingying answered. "What's that has to do with Linghu Chong? You kept on saying Linghu Chong killed your daughter, that's wrongly blaming the wrong person."

Yue Buqun laughed aloud. "Lin Pingzhi is my son-in-law. Don't you know this? They're newly wed, and so loving toward each other. Why would he kill his own wife for?"

"Lin Pingzhi wanted to rely on Songshan School, so to make Zuo Lengchan believe that he has nothing to do with you, he killed his own wife," Yingying explained.

Yue Buqun again laughed loudly. "Nonsense, Songshan School? Is there still a Songshan School in this world? Songshan School has merged into the Five Mountains School. Within Wulin, Songshan School's name is no more. Why would Lin Pingzhi go to rely on Songshan School? Also, Lin Pingzhi knows Zuo Lengchan is my subordinate. Instead of coming to his father-in-law who is the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, he went to rely on a blind person who can

even barely protect himself. Even among the dumbest person in this world, this kind of stupidity simply couldn't exist."

"It's up to you whether you want to believe me or not. You can ask Lin Pingzhi yourself when you find him."

Yue Buqun's voice turned grim as he said, "The person I'm looking for right now isn't Lin Pingzhi. It's Linghu Chong. Everyone in Jianghu is saying that Linghu Chong was rude to my daughter and that she fought back against that traitor with all of her power until she was finally killed. You've weaved this lie to hide Linghu Chong, so it's obvious you're working together with him."

Yingying snorted and laughed derisively.

"Young lady Ren, your father is the Chief of the Sun Moon Sect. I originally wouldn't have given you any trouble, but to force Linghu Chong to come out, there's no other way, I'm forced to punish you a little bit. First, I'm going to chop off your left hand. Then, I'll chop off your right hand. Next would be your left foot, followed by your right foot. If that bastard Linghu Chong still has the slightest bit of conscience, then he will show up."

"I don't think you dare," Yingying shouted. "If you harm one hair on my head, my father will kill everyone in your Five Mountains School and not leave a single one alive."

Yue Buqun smiled and said, "I don't dare?" After he said this, he slowly pulled out the long sword hanging on his waist out of its scabbard.

Linghu Chong couldn't take it anymore so he rushed out of the underbrush and shouted, "Master, Linghu Chong's here!"

Yingying gasped in surprised and hastily said, "Go away, go away! He doesn't dare to harm me."

Linghu Chong shook his head as he walked a few steps closer. "Master..."

"Little thief, you still have some face to call me: 'Master?'" Yue Buqun said severely.



Linghu Chong's eyes were brimming with tears as he knelt on the ground and said in a trembling voice, "Emperor of Heaven, Linghu Chong has always treated Miss Yue with respect. I would never dare to be rude to her. Linghu Chong has received your kindness and was brought up by you. If you want to kill me then kill me."

Yingying was worried; she called out, "Brother Chong, this person is half-male, half-female, he's lost his humanity long ago, quickly go away!"

Yue Buqun's face suddenly turned murderous as he turned toward Yingying and grimly said, "What do you mean by that?"

"You practised the Evil Resisting Sword Art, cas... cas... carelessly disturbed yourself and made yourself half-dead half-alive just like a ghost. Brother Chong, do you remember Dongfang Bubai? All of them are crazy, don't treat them like ordinary people." Yingying was hoping Linghu Chong would flee at once. She knew that after what she just said, Yue Buqun would never let her go but she didn't care about that.

Yue Buqun coldly said, "Where did you hear those cynical remarks you just made?"

"From Lin Pingzhi's own mouth. You stole Lin Pingzhi's Evil Resisting Sword Manual, you think he doesn't know? When you threw that Buddhist robe down the canyon, Lin Pingzhi was hiding outside your window. He took that robe. That's why he... he also learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art. If not for this, how would he be able to kill Mu Gaofeng and Yu Canghai? With regards to how he finished learning the Evil Resisting Sword Art, of course, you know how this is done as well. Brother Chong, listen to Yue Buqun's voice. It's just like a girl. He... he and Dongfang Bubai are the same, they lost their normal sex a long time ago."

She heard the conversation between Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan inside the carriage, but Linghu Chong did not. She knew Linghu Chong respected and loved his Master. She also didn't want to add to his sadness, and this topic was very

inconvenient to speak of, so she had not mentioned it in the last few months. But at this time, it was very urgent so she was forced to reveal this to make Linghu Chong understand, to make him see that the person in front of him wasn't a great headmaster in Wulin. But he was merely a freak who had lost his sex, and that he was also an insane person who could not be spoken to with reason.

The murderous look on Yue Buqun's eyes became fiercer. He loathingly said, "Young lady Ren, I wanted to spare you your life. But after this nonsense you spouted, I can't allow you to live anymore. You courted your own death, don't blame me for this."

Yingying shouted, "Brother Chong, quickly go, quickly go!"

Linghu Chong knew his master's hand was extremely fast, and with just a tremble of his sword, Yingying would immediately lose her life. When he saw Yue Buqun had lifted his sword, looking like he was going to thrust out, he shouted, "If you want to kill someone, then kill me, don't harm her."

Yue Buqun turned his head around and laughed coldly. "You've just learned a little bit of a three-legged sword art and you think you can run amuck in Jianghu? Pick up the sword. I'll kill you to make you believe."

"I wouldn't dare... wouldn't dare to fight against mas... fight against you," Linghu Chong stammered out.

"Even today, what are you putting on air for?" Yue Buqun shouted. "That day on the boat on the Yellow River and the Five Tyrant Ridge, you allied yourself with the people from the unorthodox path, and deliberately made me lose face. I've already decided to kill you back then, but it's very good for you that I've been putting up with you so far. At Fuzhou, you fell into my hand. If it wasn't for my wife blocking me, I would've sent you to the King of Hell back then. I made a mistake back then, and now you've instead taken my daughter's life."

Linghu Chong hastily called out, "I didn't... I didn't... "

"Pick up the sword!" Yue Buqun angrily shouted. "You only have to win against this sword in my hand and then you can kill me straight away. Otherwise, I also won't spare you. This Devil Sect's witch likes to speak nonsense, let me cripple her first!" When he finished speaking, he slashed his sword to behead Yingying.

Linghu Chong's left hand was still holding the big piece of rock. Originally, he wanted to use it to help Yue Buqun by stopping him from falling down the trap. At this point, with no time to think, he quickly tossed the rock at Yue Buqun's chest. Yue Buqun leaned his

body to one side to dodge it. Linghu Chong rolled on the ground, picked up the long sword Yingying had dropped on the ground, and stabbed it at Yue Buqun's left leg. If Yue Buqun had slashed his sword toward Linghu Chong initially, Linghu Chong would've stood still and was prepared to get stabbed. But after hearing Yingying revealing his secret, Yue Buqun was so startled and angry that he actually chopped at Yingying first. Linghu Chong couldn't do anything else but help. Yue Buqun blocked three attacks and retreated for two steps. He was secretly amazed. He just blocked three times, but his whole arm was shaken and felt numb. When they fought at the Shaolin Temple, they fought for more than a thousand moves, but Linghu Chong didn't use his true internal energy with his sword. But at this time, he did not give way in his three attacks.

Linghu Chong forced Yue Buqun to step back, while he extended his hand backwards to release Yingying's sealed acupoints. Yingying called out, "Don't worry about me, watch out!"

White light flashed as Yue Buqun's long sword thrust forward. Linghu Chong had seen Dongfang Bubai, Yue Buqun, and Lin Pingzhi's martial arts, so he knew his opponent's movements were unbelievably quick like a ghost or a demon.

If he waited till he saw a flaw in the oncoming attack, he would've gotten stabbed. So he counterattacked by

slashing at Yue Buqun's lower abdomen with his long sword.

Yue Buqun quickly leapt back and scolded, "What a fierce small thief!" Actually, even though Yue Buqun had raised Linghu Chong since he was small, he didn't understand him. If he had actually ignored Linghu Chong's counter attack and kept on thrusting his sword, he would've taken Linghu Chong's life. Even though Linghu Chong was using a

common ruin method, he would never have continued his attack and pierced his master's lower abdomen. Yue Buqun was judging other people by what he would do himself so he immediately leapt back, missing a good opportunity to injure his opponent.

After several moves, Yue Buqun couldn't stand it anymore so he increased the speed of his sword. Linghu Chong concentrated his mind to keep up. In the beginning, Linghu Chong was thinking that if he were to die under his master's hand, there was no pity in that for him except Yingying would also be killed. Furthermore, Yingying's word had

harmed his master so she would definitely be tortured before she die. Thus, he exerted himself in fighting back with all of his heart so as to protect Yingying. After fighting for several dozens moves, Yue Buqun's changes became complicated. Linghu Chong concentrated fully on the fight and he was gradually enlightened. His eyes were now only looking at the point of his opponent's sword.

With Dugu Nine Swords, the stronger the enemy was the more powerful it became. That day below the West Lake inside the prison, he fought with Ren Woxing whose martial art was of one of the highest quality which was very rare in this world. But no matter how Ren Woxing's sword rose, shifted, and changed, Linghu Chong's Dugu Nine Sword

adapted reactively against his moves. Whether it was attacking or defending, he countered each move successfully. At present, Linghu Chong had already learned the Art of Essence Absorbing and his internal energy had improved greatly since that time below the West Lake. Even though Yue Buqun's Evil Resisting Sword Art was weird, he

had not learnt it for very long and he was not as good as Linghu Chong who had studied his Dugu Nine Sword for quite some time now. Compared to Dongfang Bubai, Yue Buqun was much worse.

After fighting for more than a hundred and fifty six moves, Linghu Chong didn't think deeply anymore when wielding his sword as there was barely any time to think with Yue Buqun's quick swordplay attacking him. Even though the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art was made up of seventy two moves, each move had several dozens changes, and as it went through all the variations, the changes became very complicated. If other people saw this swordplay, even if they didn't become dizzy from looking at it, they would still be bewildered from seeing this complicated swordplay and they wouldn't be able to execute their own sword moves. But the Dugu Nine Swords that Linghu Chong learned had no set moves to speak of, so it was natural for him to follow the movements of his opponent. If the enemy only had one move, then he would only have one move. If

the enemy had a thousand moves then he would also have a thousand moves. Thus, in Yue Buqun's eyes, Linghu Chong's swordplay was very complicated and was far better than his own sword art. He was afraid that even if they fought for three days and three nights, Linghu Chong would still come up with more new moves. Yue Buqun thought till here and he couldn't help feeling afraid. He also thought, "This witch from the Ren family has already found out the secret of me learning this sword art. If I can't kill these two people today, this matter will be spread throughout Jianghu. Then

how can I still have the face to be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School? All of my planning

would've been ruined. But that traitor Lin Pingzhi already told this Ren witch, so what would prevent him from saying this to other people? This... this..." With anxiety in his heart, his swordplay became even fiercer but his mind was agitated and his swordplay was actually hindered. The Evil Resisting Sword Art depended on speed to take

victory. If you fought for more than a hundred moves yet was still unable to win, then the fierceness of this sword art would unavoidably be lessened. Also, with his heart separated, the power of his sword art was greatly reduced.

Linghu Chong's mind was moved as he suddenly saw a flaw in his opponent's sword art. The most important aspect of the Dugu Nine Swords was to see the weakness in the opponent's martial art. No matter whether it was bare hand, kicks, sabres, or swords, every move must have a weakness. Once a flaw has been seen, you could take

advantage of it by attacking it. That day at the Dark Wood Cliff, he fought with Dongfang Bubai who, only holding a piece of embroidery needle, moved as fast as lightning and was unbelievably quick. So even though there were still weaknesses in the movements of his body and attacks, they were only fleeting. Linghu Chong only managed to see the flaws but they were gone in the next instant which made him unable

to attack those flaws. That was the reason why the four masters, Linghu Chong, Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying, were unable to win against a little embroidery needle. Later on, Linghu Chong saw Yue Buqun and Zuo Lengchan fighting at the place of worship, and Lin Pingzhi fighting with Mu Gaofeng, Yu Canghai, and the Qingcheng

disciples. Recently, he had been thinking hard about the flaws in the movements of that sword art, but he had always run into the single difficulty -- the speed of the opponent's

swordplay. When a flaw could only be seen fleetingly, it was very hard to attack.

At this time, he had endured fighting against Yue Buqun for close to two hundred moves when he saw Yue Buqun exposing a weakness underneath his right armpit in a slash of his sword. Yue Buqun had used this move earlier. Originally, the changes in his swordplay were very complicated and he didn't repeat any of his moves in the past two hundred moves. But now, he has finally repeated one move. After several more moves, Yue Buqun's long sword slashed out horizontally exposing a weakness on his left waist. He had again repeated another move. Suddenly, a thought flashed in Linghu Chong's mind, "His Evil Resisting Sword Art is extremely quick, and his flaws aren't actual flaws. Even though there's no weakness in his sword moves, I've finally found out a weakness in his swordplay -- his swordplay repeats."

In this world, in whichever sword art, no matter how complicated and how many changes your swordplay had, you would eventually finish using all the sword moves. Once the sword moves were used up and you still weren't able to gain victory, then it would be unavoidable that you would have to reuse the sword moves you had used earlier in the fight. But for masters, their refined sword arts would always have eight or ten groups, and within each group there would be dozens of moves, and each move would have its variations. So it was very unusual for them to fight for more than a thousand moves before the outcome of the fight was decided. Even though Yue Buqun knows a lot of other swordplay he could use, he knew Linghu Chong's sword art was actually too strong and that Linghu Chong was also familiar with the Huashan School's sword art. So besides the Evil Resisting Sword Art, there was no other sword art he could use that could gain victory. By now, Yue Buqun had repeated many moves. Knowing he now had the opportunities to take victory, Linghu Chong felt happy.

When Yue Buqun saw the corner of Linghu Chong's mouth smiling, he was secretly startled. Yue Buqun thought, "What's this little thief smiling about? Has he figured out a way to defeat me?" He immediately moved his internal energy, and was suddenly advancing and retreating to go around Linghu Chong in a circle. His sword moves were like a violent storm and they were getting faster and faster. Yingying was still lying down on the ground and from her position, she couldn't see Yue Buqun's body clearly anymore. She felt dizzy looking at him; her chest felt nauseated and she felt like throwing up.

After fighting for thirty more moves, Yue Buqun's left hand stabbed forward while he withdrew his right hand. Linghu Chong knew this was the third time he had used this move. After fighting for so long, Linghu Chong felt tired as his injury was just beginning to heal. He knew the situation was highly dangerous, and under Yue Buqun's lightning fast attack, if he was just slightly careless, he would lose his life and Yingying would be tortured. So seeing Yue Buqun using this move again, he immediately sent his sword out and stabbed it at his opponent's right armpit. The spot that this slanting sword was stabbing at was the weakness of Yue Buqun's next move. This was really anticipating what the enemy was going to do and made Yue Buqun's really anxious. Even though this move by Yue Buqun was extremely quick, Linghu Chong's attack was done earlier. The move from the Evil Resisting Sword Art had not changed yet, but Linghu Chong had already thrust at Yue Buqun's armpit making him unable to block or dodge. Yue Buqun cried out sharply, sounding surprised, angry, and desperate. Linghu Chong's sword had already arrived at his opponent's armpit, but when he heard Yue Buqun's sharp cry, he

immediately thought, "I'm going too far, he's my master, how can I injure him?" He quickly pulled his sword back and said, "The winner and loser has been decided. Let's save Master-Wife, then... then we'll go our own ways!"



Yue Buqun's face was pale as he slowly nodded his head. "Alright! I admit defeat."

Linghu Chong tossed his long sword on the ground and turned his head around to look at Yingying. Suddenly, Yue Buqun shouted and his long sword thrust out as fast as lightning and stabbed Linghu Chong's left waist. Greatly astonished, Linghu Chong quickly extended his hand to pick up his sword. But how could he be fast enough? With a 'pu' sound, the point of the sword had entered the back of his waist. Luckily, Linghu Chong's internal energy was abundant. When the sword reached his body, his muscle automatically retracted, making the sword slid to one side so that the sword point pierced his body slantingly and did not injure any fatal points. Yue Buqun was exulted. He pulled out his sword and quickly followed it with a chop. Linghu Chong hastily rolled for a few feet. Yue Buqun rushed forward with his sword slashing ferociously. Linghu Chong rolled again.

'Tang' sounded as Yue Buqun's sword chopped the ground and missed Linghu Chong's head by only a few inches. Yue Buqun lifted his sword, and with a fierce-looking laugh, he lifted his sword high above his head. He rushed forward for a step and chopped his sword down on Linghu Chong's head again. Suddenly, there was nothing underneath his

foot, and his body slumped to the ground. He was greatly surprised and nervously sucked in a breath of air and was waiting for his right foot to hit the ground to leap up. But all of a sudden, the sky revolved and the ground turned, and he lost consciousness. With a booming sound, he fell into the trap.

Linghu Chong had just escaped from death. Using his left hand, he pressed on the wound on his waist and struggled to sit up. Then he heard several people calling out at the same time from the underbrush, "Young lady! Sacred Lady!" Several people rushed out. They were Bao Dachu, Elder Mo, and the other four Devil Sect people. Bao Dachu was

the first to arrive on the side of the trap. He held his breath, reversed his sabre, and hit Yue Buqun's head repeatedly. He knew Yue Buqun's internal energy was good so the confusion poison wouldn't affect him for long. These hits would put him out for half a day. Linghu Chong hastily scrambled besides Yingying and asked, "Which... which acupoints did he seal?"

"You... You... Are you ... Are you alright?" Yingying was frightened. Her voice quivered and she found it hard to control herself. Her teeth were chattering.

"I won't die, don't... don't be afraid."

"Behead that bastard!" Yingying shouted.

"Yes!" Bao Dachu acknowledged.

"Don't kill him!" Linghu Chong hastily interrupted.

Yingying saw he was worried, so she said, "Alright, then quickly... quickly capture him."

She didn't know there was confusion poison in the trap already and she was afraid Yue Buqun would jump up again since no one up on the ground was Yue Buqun's match.

"As ordered!" Bao Dachu acknowledged. He didn't dare to say that they had dug the trap themselves and that they had been hiding on the side all this time. But when the young lady was captured by Yue Buqun, everyone was afraid of dying so they didn't dare to go out and help. If someone looked into this matter, this would become a big thing, so they had to pretend that they had arrived there by luck and sheer coincidence. Bao Dachu clutched the back of Yue Buqun's neck and lifted him up. Then his hand shot out like the wind and he sealed twelve of Yue Buqun's acupoints. He then took out some rope and tied both of Yue Buqun's hands and legs tightly. Confusion poison, hits on the head, sealed acupoints, and tied ropes -- these were four things that restricted Yue Buqun. Even if Yue Buqun's skill was much higher, it would still be very hard for him to escape.

Linghu Chong and Yingying were looking at each other like they were in a dream. After a long time, Yingying cried

and Linghu Chong hugged her. Having escaped from death just then, they both felt life couldn't be sweeter. After Linghu Chong helped release Yingying's sealed acupoints, he saw his Master-Wife was still lying on the ground.

"Aiyo!" Linghu Chong called out. He quickly went over to help her up and release her acupoints. "Master-Wife, sorry for the offence."

Madam Yue had seen everything. She knew Linghu Chong's personality and knew he had a very deep love toward Yue Lingshan. Linghu Chong had treated Yue Lingshan like she was a goddess from heaven, so he would never have dared to offend her at all. He didn't even dare to scold Yue Lingshan and he was even willing to risk his life for her.

To think that he would torture or kill her, that was just a very ridiculous thing to think of. Moreover, she had seen with her own eyes how well he treated Yingying, so how could his personality be different? Linghu Chong used his sword to stop her husband but he

stilled his hand from killing him. On the other hand, her husband, the respectable headmaster of the Five Mountains School, had suddenly become violent and unexpectedly used a despicable method that even people from the unorthodox path despised and other people would mock at. Madam Yue felt completely discouraged. She lightly asked, "Chong'er, was Shan'er really killed by Lin Pingzhi?"

Linghu Chong's heart was pained and tears rolled down his cheeks. He chokingly said, "Disciple... I... I..."

Madam Yue interrupted, "He doesn't regard you as his disciple anymore, but I still regard you as my disciple. If you like, I'm still your Master-Wife."

Linghu Chong's heart swelled with gratitude as he paid his respect to her, while calling out, "Master-Wife! Master-Wife!"

Madam Yue gently caressed his hair and tears were streaming down her eyes. She slowly said, "Was what young

lady Ren said true? Did Lin Pingzhi kill Shan'er because he's learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art and has also gone to rely on Zuo Lengchan?"

"That's right."

"Turn around," Madam Yue chokingly said. "Let me have a look at your injuries."

"Yes," Linghu Chong replied and turned around.

Madam Yue tore the gown at his back and sealed four acupoints around his injuries. "Do you still have Heng-Shan School's medicine?"

"I do," Linghu Chong answered. Yingying took the medicine out from his bosom and gave it to Madam Yue.

Madam Yue wiped the blood on his wound and applied the medicine. She then took out a white handkerchief from her bosom and pressed it on his wound. Then she tore a piece of cloth from her skirt and wrapped the injury up. Linghu Chong had always regarded Madam Yue as his own mother, so seeing her treating him like this, he was greatly comforted and forgot all the pain from his injury.

"In the future," Madam Yue said. "You will of course kill Lin Pingzhi to avenge Shan'er."

With tears in his eyes, Linghu Chong said, "Little martial sister... Little martial sister... Just before she died, she asked Son to look after Lin Pingzhi. Son couldn't bear hurting her so I promised her. This matter... This is a really difficult matter."

Madam Yue let out a really long sigh and said, "Retribution! Retribution!" She then said, "Chong'er, you cannot be too good to other people when dealing with them in the future!"

"Yes!"

Suddenly, he felt something warm flowing down the back of his neck. He turned his head around and saw Madam Yue's face was pale. Startled, he called out, "Master-Wife, Master-Wife!"

When he stood up to support her, he saw a dagger sticking out of her chest. The dagger had pierced her heart.

She had already passed away. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded and he wanted to call out but no sound was coming out of his mouth. Yingying was also alarmed. But because she had no relationship with Madam Yue, she was just startled and

feeling pitiful but not mournful. She went besides Linghu Chong to hold him, and after some time, Linghu Chong started crying. Bao Dachu saw the two young lovers had met with a mournful loss and that they would have a lot of things to say to each other, so he didn't dare to disturb them. He was also afraid that Yingying would ask the origin of the trap so the six of them needed to consult each other first on what to say to deceive her. So they carried Yue Buqun up and retreated far away.

"Where... Where are they taking my master?" Linghu Chong asked.

"You're still calling him master?" Yingying asked.

"Ai, I'm very accustomed to it. Why did Master-Wife have to commit suicide? Why did... why did she have to kill herself?"

Yingying answered with hatred in her voice, "Of course it's all because of that traitor Yue Buqun. Married to such a despicable and shameless husband, if she can't kill him, then it's better to commit suicide. Let's kill Yue Buqun quickly and avenge your Master-Wife."

Linghu Chong hesitantly said, "You're saying we should kill him? He was once my master and he brought me up."

"Even though he's your master and he's also brought you up, he's tried to kill you a few times already. The love and hate between you two have been wiped out a long time ago. But you haven't repaid the kindness shown by your Master-Wife. Didn't your Master-Wife die under his hand?"

Linghu Chong sighed and mournfully said, "My Master-Wife's kindness will be difficult to repay in my lifetime. Even though there's nothing between Yue Buqun and I anymore, I still can't kill him."

"It doesn't have to be you." Yingying then raised her voice and called out, "Elder Bao!"

"Yes, young lady," Elder Bao loudly answered and walked over along with Elder Mo and the other people.

"Did my father send you to handle things here?"

Bao Dachu bowed and replied, "Yes, Chief commanded Subordinate along with Elder Ge, Du, and Mo to lead ten brothers to think of a way to capture Yue Buqun and bring him back to the altar."

"Where's Elder Ge and Du?"

"More than four hours ago they went to lead Yue Buqun here. We haven't seen them since, I'm afraid... I'm afraid..."

"Search Yue Buqun's body."

"Yes!" Bao Dachu acknowledged and searched Yue Buqun's body. From Yue Buqun's bosom, he took out an embroidered flag, which was the five mountains sword schools alliance's flag, around ten gold and silver taels, and two copper plates. Bao Dachu was indignant as he reported, "Reporting to young lady: Elder Ge and Du have definitely met with this bastard's violent hand. These are the two elders' sect plate." As he said this, he lifted his leg and gave a hard kick to Yue Buqun's waist.

"Don't harm him," Linghu Chong shouted.

"Yes," Bao Dachu respectfully answered.

"Bring some cold water and wake him up," Yingying ordered.

Elder Mo took out the water canteen on his waist, opened the lid, and poured the cold water on Yue Buqun's head. After some time, Yue Buqun groaned and opened his eyes. He felt terrible pain on his head and waist, and groaned again.

Yingying inquired, "Person surnamed Yue, did you kill Elder Ge and Du from my sect?"

Bao Dachu picked up the two copper plates and tossed them up repeatedly making a 'zheng, zheng' noise.

Maybe Yue Buqun didn't feel he would be lucky enough to escape with his life so he scolded, "I killed them. All the

demonic disciples from the Devil Sect must be executed."

Bao Dachu wanted to kick him again, but he considered the depth of Linghu Chong's friendship with Chief and also of the fact that Linghu Chong was going to be Young Lady's future husband. Therefore, since Linghu Chong had already said 'don't harm him', he didn't dare to disobey his order.

Yingying coldly laughed. "You're the headmaster of an orthodox sect but when you handle things, you're a hundred times more wicked than the Divine Sun Moon Sect's people. But you still have the face to scold us as the demonic disciples. Even your wife hated you so bitterly that she'd rather commit suicide than to continue being your wife. Do you still have the face to live in this world?"

Yue Buqun scolded, "Little witch, you're speaking nonsense! My wife was clearly killed by you but you're trying to slander me by saying she killed herself."

"Brother Chong, listen to him," Yingying said. "He's so shameless,"

Linghu Chong spoke indistinctly, "Yingying, I'd like to ask you a favour."

"You want me to release him? I'm afraid it's easy to capture a tiger but it'll be hard release it. This person's heart is very calculating and filled with hatred. His martial art is also very strong. Later on, when he find you again and we might not be as lucky as today."

"We'll let him go today. Our relationship as master and disciple finishes today. I already know all of his sword art in my mind. If he dares to find me again, then things won't go well for him."

Yingying knew it wasn't easy at all for him to kill Yue Buqun. But if from now on Linghu Chong didn't care about their old relationship anymore, then he wouldn't be afraid of facing Yue Buqun again. "Alright, we'll spare his life today. Elder Bao, Elder Mo, spread the word in Jianghu of how we have spared Yue Buqun's life. Also say how Yue Buqun has cut off his own limb to learn the demonical sword art, and

that he's now not male not female. Let all the heroes in the realm hear about this."

Bao Dachu and Elder Mo acknowledged the order together. Yue Buqun's face turned ashen and both of his eyes turned malicious. But thinking he still had his life, there was still a trace of happiness in his eyes.

Yingying said, "You hate me. Do you think I'm afraid?" She slashed her long sword and cut the ropes binding him. She walked near him and unsealed the acupoints on his back. Her right palm pressed against his mouth, while her left palm hit the back of his head. Yue Buqun's mouth opened, and he felt a small pill in his mouth. At the same time, Yingying's right hand pinched his nose blocking his air. When Yingying cut his ropes and unsealed the acupoints at the back of his body, her back was facing toward Linghu Chong and was blocking his vision, so Linghu Chong couldn't see her putting the pill into Yue Buqun's mouth. Linghu Chong only saw her releasing his master and he felt comforted. With his nose blocked, Yue Buqun had to use his mouth to draw breath. At the same time, Yingying used force on her right hand to force Yue Buqun to take the pill along with his breath.

After Yue Buqun had swallowed the pill, he was scared out of his wits thinking the pill he just swallowed was the Devil Sect's most evil pill called the 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill'. He had heard people said, that after taking this pill, every year during the dragon boat festival you must take a medicine to prevent the corpse bug inside the pill from coming out. Otherwise, the corpse bug would come out, enter your brain, and chew your brain out. There was no need to say how painful it would be. Furthermore, you would be crazed and you would become worse than a crazy dog. Even though he was intelligent, full of ideas, and calm under pressure, he was still sweating profusely and

his face had turned pale thinking of this situation.



Yingying stood straight as she said, "Brother Chong, they sealed his acupoints too heavily. These last two acupoints will loosen a bit only after some time, so he just has to endure it for now."

"Many thanks," Linghu Chong replied.

Yingying smiled captivatingly and thought, "I secretly did something and deceived you, but this is all for your own good." After some time, she knew that the pill in Yue Buqun's stomach would have transformed and there would be no way for him to vomit it out anymore. She bent down to release the two acupoints, and as she did so, she whispered, "Every year during the dragon boat festival, come up the Dark Wood Cliff and I'll give you the medicine."

When Yue Buqun heard this, he knew the pill he took just then was really the 'Three Corpse Brain Pill'. He couldn't help shaking as he tremblingly asked, "That... That was the Three Corpse... Three Corpse..."

Yingying giggled and in a loud voice said, "Correct, respected sir. This kind of wonderful drug is not easily made. In our sect, only people of high positions with outstanding martial arts are entitled to take it. Elder Bao, isn't this right?"

Bao Dachu bowed and said, "Thanks to Chief's kindness that he gave this divine pellet to Subordinate. Subordinate will always be loyal and will always follow his order. After I've taken this pill, Chief's confidence in me has increased and it has actually given me untold benefits. Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Linghu Chong was startled. "You gave my mast... gave him the three corpse brain pill?"

Yingying laughingly answered, "He swallowed it in a hurry himself. He was probably so hungry that he was just about to eat anything. Yue Buqun, you must protect Brother Chong and my life from now on to benefit yourself."

Yue Buqun's heart was filled with hatred but he thought, "If this witch met some kind of accident and was killed by someone, then... then I'll die miserably. Even if she's still

alive but has received some kind of heavy injury and couldn't make it back to Dark Wood Cliff before the Dragon Boat Festival, then where would I look for her? Also, maybe she doesn't intend to give me the medicine in the first place..." He thought till here and he couldn't help shivering. Even though he had divine martial art, he didn't know what to do. Linghu Chong sighed thinking that Yingying was originally from the Devil Sect so her action had a demonical air to it, but she had done this because of him so he couldn't blame her for this.

Yingying said to Bao Dachu, "Elder Bao, go back and report to Chief. Say that the Five Mountains School's Headmaster, Mr. Yue, has sincerely surrendered to our sect and that he has also taken our sect's divine pill, so it's not possible for him to rebel."

Bao Dachu was initially worried when he saw Linghu Chong wanting to release Yue Buqun. He was really afraid that he would be blamed by Chief when he returned to the gathering altar. So when he saw Yue Buqun took the 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill', he was greatly exulted. With joy, he hastily replied, "Young lady presided over the whole battle and everything was completed successfully. Chief will surely be happy. Chief flourishes the divine sect and benefits the common people."

Yingying said, "Mr. Yue has already turned over to our sect so we can't mention the things that would damage his reputation to outsiders. And you also mustn't mention him taking the divine pill. This person's position in Wulin is very high, his wisdom and knowledge are high, his martial art is good, Chief will definitely have use of his position."

"Yes, I will follow Young Lady's order," Bao Dachu answered.

When Linghu Chong saw how distressed Yue Buqun was, he couldn't help feeling sad. Even though Yue Buqun wanted to kill him and had been very violent toward him, he could not forget the past twenty years when he and Master-Wife

had brought him up. Linghu Chong had always regarded him as his own father. Suddenly, everything had changed into hatred and he was feeling very bad. He wanted to say a few things to comfort him but it was as if there were something stuck in his throat that he couldn't make a sound.

Yingying said, "Elder Bao, Elder Mo, go back to Dark Wood Cliff. Ask daddy on my behalf if he is well, ask uncle Xiang if he is well. I'll wait.. wait for him... wait for master Linghu to get better, then we'll come to the gathering altar to see daddy."

If it were another girl, Bao Dachu would've said, "I wish for Master to recover soon and return to Dark Wood Cliff with young lady. Then we'll all drink a congratulatory wine to you as soon as possible." Toward a pair of young lovers, this speech would've been extremely good. But toward Yingying, how would he dare to say such thing? He didn't even dare to take a look at the two of them as he lowered his head and bowed continuously. Bao Dachu's face was tense and he just answered yes to everything and was looking very respectful. He was actually really afraid Yingying might find out he was actually laughing inside.

This lady was afraid people would mock her and Linghu Chong for loving each other so she had caused many troubles for the warriors in Jianghu. This was very well known throughout Wulin. Bao Dachu didn't dare to linger too much longer, so he immediately took his leave from Yingying and Linghu Chong, and took the other people with him as he went. When they were leaving, he was even more respectful toward Linghu Chong than Yingying. He was an old person in Jianghu who had gone through a lot of experience, so he knew being respectful toward Linghu Chong would make Yingying very happy.

Yingying saw Yue Buqun was standing woodenly. "Mr. Yue, you can go too. Are you going to take your wife's remain to bury in Huashan?"

Yue Buqun shook his head. "I'd like to bother the two of you to bury her in this small mountainside!" After he said this he didn't give another glance toward the two of them before he quickly left. In just a short time, he had disappeared behind the trees. Such quick movement was rarely seen in Jianghu. By the fall of the evening, Linghu Chong and Yingying had buried Madam Yue's remain besides Yue Lingshan's tomb. Linghu Chong cried out again.

The next morning, Yingying asked, "Brother Chong, how's your injury?"

"This injury isn't serious, there's no need to worry."

"That's very good. Our place here has been discovered by other people. I'd like to wait for you to rest for a few days here, then we'll go to another place."

"That's also good. Little martial sister has her mother to accompany her, she won't be afraid anymore." His heart was pained and he also said, "My master has always been upright all his life, but his temperament has changed greatly because of that demonical sword art."

Yingying shook her head and said, "That's not necessarily true. When he sent your little martial sister and Lao Denuo to Fuzhou to open up the wine shop, he was already trying to get the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. That's not necessarily what a gentleman does."

Linghu Chong was silent. He had already thought of this matter before but he had never dared to think about it deeply. Yingying went on, "Actually, it shouldn't be called the Evil Resisting Sword Art. It should be called 'Demonical Sword Art'. If this sword manual were to be circulated in Jianghu, there'll be endless harm. Yue Buqun still

lives in this world; Lin Pingzhi also has the sword manual memorized. But I don't think he would give everything to Zuo Lengchan and Lao Denuo. Lin Pingzhi is such a calculating person. Why would he be willing to give this sword manual to other people?"

Linghu Chong said, "Both Zuo Lengchan and Lin Pingzhi are blind, but Lao Denuo isn't. So Lin Pingzhi would probably be taken advantage of. These three very smart people are living with each other and yet are suspicious toward each other, I wonder what would happen. Two against one, Lin Pingzhi would be afraid that he'll be disadvantaged."

"Are you really going to think of a way to protect Lin Pingzhi?"

Linghu Chong looked at Yue Lingshan's tomb and said, "I shouldn't have promised little martial sister that I'd protect Lin Pingzhi. This person is worse than a dog. I hate him with all my heart, how can I go and help him? But I've already promised little martial sister. If I eat my words, then it'll be hard for her to be peaceful under the nine fountains."

"When she was still alive, she might not have known who really treated her well, but after she died, she would definitely understand. She wouldn't want you to protect Lin Pingzhi!"

Linghu Chong shook his head and said, "That's hard to say. Little martial sister and Lin Pingzhi were very loving in the past. She knew Lin Pingzhi's intention toward her was evil but she still couldn't bear to see him harmed."

Yingying thought, "This is true. If it were me, I wouldn't care how you treat me, I'll always wish you well with all my heart."

Linghu Chong stayed in the valley for more than ten days and his new injury became much better. He said that once they arrived back in Heng-Shan, he would give the headmaster position to Yiqing. Then there would be nothing worrying him, and he would be able to travel the world with Yingying and find a secluded and nice place to live in.

Yingying said, "This matter of Lin Pingzhi, what are you going to do about the responsibility given by your departed little martial sister?"

Linghu Chong scratched his head and said, "It's the thing giving me the most headache. It's best if you don't mention

it anymore. I'll just deal with it when it comes to me."

Yingying smiled and didn't say anymore. The two of them gave their respects in front of the two tombs and took their leave.

# **Chapter 37: Forcing Marriage**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**





**The two figures in the reflection looked exactly the same, both had baggy lady's robes, even the hair bun were no different. It was an exact copy of him. Linghu Chong was so frightened that his heart almost stopped beating.**

After Linghu Chong and Yingying came out from the valley, they walked for half a day and arrived at a small town. They went to a noodle shop to eat some noodle. Linghu Chong had picked up a few strings of noodles with his chopsticks when he chuckled and said, "We haven't paid our respect to heaven and earth to get married..."

Yingying's whole face immediately became bright red. "Who said I'm going to pay respect to heaven and earth to marry you?" she angrily replied.

"We'll get married in the future," said a smiling Linghu Chong. "If you're not willing, then I'll grab you and make you pay respect to heaven and earth."

Yingying was looking like she was smiling but not smiling at the same time. "You were so well behaved when we were in the valley. Once we come out, you're speaking such improper crazy talks again."

Linghu Chong was still smiling as he replied, "We must definitely be most proper concerning this lifelong great matter. Yingying, that day in the valley, I suddenly thought of something. After we become husband and wife, I wonder how many kids we'll have."

Yingying stood up abruptly with a scowl on her face. "If you keep saying these things, I won't go back with you to Heng-Shan."

"Alright, alright, I'll stop, I'll stop," Linghu Chong laughed. But he continued, "There are so many peach trees in that valley that it looks like a peach valley. If we have six ghosts, wouldn't they become Little Peach Valley Six Fairies?"

"How can we have six ghosts?" Yingying muttered as she sat back down. At the same time she said this, she understood what he meant. This was more crazy talk from

Linghu Chong. Her eyes widened showing the whites all around them; she looked at Linghu Chong and quickly lowered her head and stuffed noodles into her mouth. Her heart was filled with sweetness.

"When we go back to Heng-Shan together, there will be some dirty minded person and there'll also be people who thought that we've gotten married. I'm afraid you won't be happy hearing such vulgar nonsense," Linghu Chong said.

This was exactly what Yingying was thinking of. She said, "That's right. It's best if we disguise ourselves as farmers; then no one would be able to recognise us."

"You have such a beautiful and lovely face. No matter what we change into, it'll always shock people. When other people see us, they'll secretly praise: 'Hey, such a beautiful girl. What is she doing with a silly little kid? How can such a rare and beautiful flower be inserted into a pile of dung?' But when they look closer, they'll definitely see this rare flower is actually the Divine Sun Moon Sect's young lady Ren while this pile of manure is the person young lady Ren favoured, Linghu Chong."

"You don't need to be so modest," Yingying smiled.

"I think, when we go back to Heng-Shan this time, I should become someone ordinary and secretly look around first. If everything's quiet and safe, I'll go there by myself and give up this headmaster position to someone. Then I'll meet with you at some secret place and we'll go down the mountain together. The gods wouldn't know, the ghosts wouldn't know, how can this be not good?"

Hearing him said this; she knew he was being considerate to her so she felt really happy. She laughingly said, "That's very good. But when you go up Mount Heng-Shan, it's best if you shave your own head and disguise yourself as a Shi Tai, especially when you are going to see those Shi Tai. No one would be suspicious of you. Brother Chong, come, I'll help you change to become a little nun. I'm only afraid you might be too good looking."

Linghu Chong waved his hand. "No, no. Once I see a nun, I'll lose all my bet. If Linghu Chong pretends to be a nun then I might get bad luck later on. That won't do at all."

Yingying laughed. "A gentleman is flexible, why do you need so many taboos for? I have to shave you now."

Linghu Chong also laughed. "There's no need to dress as a nun. But to go up Xianxing Peak, I'll need to dress as a woman. But once I speak, people will know I'm a man. I have an idea. Do you remember the person from the Hanging Temple on Mount Cui Ping beyond the Porcelain Oven Pass?"

Yingying hummed as she thought. Then she clapped her hands and said, "Wonderful, wonderful! There's a mute and deaf servant at the Hanging Temple. Even when we turned that temple upside down, she didn't hear a single thing. When you ask her anything, she just stupidly looks at you. You want to disguise as this person?"

"That's right."

"Alright, let's go buy a gown for you to change into," said Yingying laughing.

Yingying used two silver taels to buy a head of long hair from a country girl. She combed it well before putting it on Linghu Chong's head. Then she let him change into a farmer woman's gown and he now looked like a woman. She then daubed some yellow powder and drew seven to eight black moles on his face. And she also stuck a piece of medicinal wrap on his lower right cheek. Linghu Chong looked in the mirror and he couldn't even recognise himself.

Yingying laughed and said, "Your figure is similar to hers, but your expression isn't. You have to wear this stupid and foolish expression: slow-witted and clumsy like."

Linghu Chong laughed. "Wearing a stupid and foolish expression is very easy, there's nothing to change. Slow-witted and clumsy, that's also Linghu Chong's true colour."

"The most important thing is when someone suddenly tries to scare you from behind, you mustn't give yourself away," Yingying cautioned.

Along the road, Linghu Chong practised to be this mute and deaf woman. The two of them didn't spend the night in an inn but lodged in an abandoned temple. Yingying again and again suddenly shouted behind him and Linghu Chong was adequately deaf to it. Within a day, they arrived at the foot of Mount Heng-Shan. They made an appointment to meet each other in three days at the Hanging Temple's field. Linghu Chong then went up the Xianxing Peak alone, leaving Yingying to spend her time nearby on the mountain.

When Linghu Chong arrived at Xianxing Peak, it was already evening. He pondered, "If I enter the convent and take a look around, martial sisters Yiqing, Zheng E, Yilin and the other martial sisters are all very observant, so they'll definitely get suspicious. It's still best if I secretly look around first."

He quickly found a secluded mountain cave and slept there until the moon was in the middle of the sky. Then he went to the living quarters of Wuse Convent at Xianxing Peak. As he neared the living quarters, he heard the sound of long swords clashing continuously. Linghu Chong was startled as he thought, "Which enemy has come here?" He touched the short sword he was hiding inside his bosom and flew towards the sword clashing sound. The sound of fighting was coming from a house more than a hundred feet outside of Wuse Convent. There was light shining out from the house's windows. Linghu Chong rushed besides the house and heard the sound of fighting become fiercer. However, when he put his eyes to the window, he immediately felt at ease. It was Yihe and Yilin practising sword while Yiqing and Zheng E were standing on the side watching. Yihe and Yilin were practising the sword art that Linghu Chong had taught them before, which was the sword art taken from the cave behind the Cliff of Contemplation on Mount Huashan. The two of them were already quite familiar with the sword art.

As they fought, Yihe's sword gradually got faster and Yilin was barely able to keep up. Yihe thrust her sword point

straight out in front of her chest. Yilin tried to circle her sword to block it but she was too late. "Ah," Yilin cried out softly. The point of Yihe's long sword was already pointing at Yilin's heart. Yihe smiled and said, "Martial sister, you lost again."

Yilin was very ashamed as she lowered her head and replied, "I've been practising but I haven't improved at all."

"You've improved compared to last time. Let's go again," Yihe said as she hacked her sword down in the middle of the air.

"Little martial sister's tired already," Yiqing interrupted. "Go to sleep with martial sister Zheng. We'll practise again tomorrow."

"Yes," Yilin replied. She put her sword back into the scabbard then took her leave from Yihe and Yiqing. Then she pulled on Zheng E's hand and went out of the door.

When Yilin turned around, Linghu Chong saw that she looked sad. He thought, "This little martial sister is always unhappy."

Yihe closed the door, then looked at Yiqing and they both shook their heads. They waited till the footsteps of Yilin and Zheng E were far away before Yihe said, "I always see little martial sister's mind not being calm. Her heart is always in turmoil; this is a big taboo for people like us. I don't know how to advise her."

Yiqing replied, "It's very hard to advise, she must understand it herself."

"I know why her mind isn't calm, her heart is always thinking of..."

Yiqing waved her hand and said, "This is the sacred ground of Buddha, don't say such kind of talk. If we're not in a hurry to avenge master then we could've let her understand it slowly and there would be no harm."

Yihe said, "Master used to say: everything in this world is destined and there's nothing we can do about it; especially when you have to concentrate your mind on something that must be done gradually. If it is forced then you can easily fall

into the world of evil. I see little martial sister is emotional both inside and outside, and with her kind of personality, she's actually unsuitable to be a person of Buddhism."

Yiqing let out a sigh and said, "I've never tasted that kind of feeling before, but... but in the end, our school must have a Buddhist to be the headmaster. Martial Brother Linghu once said that he's only going to be the headmaster of this school temporarily only. But first we have to deal with that traitor Yue Buqun, who killed our master and martial uncles..."

Linghu Chong was greatly startled when he heard this. "How can it be my master who killed their master and martial uncles?" Then he heard Yiqing went on, "If we don't avenge this deep hatred, then we, as their disciples, won't be able to eat and sleep peacefully."

Yihe said, "I'm even more anxious compared to you. Alright, we'll intensify her sword training tomorrow."

"The common saying goes: you botch it by hurrying it, but not forcing it will let you advance greatly. However, in the past few days, I've seen little martial sister's vigour becoming less and less," Yiqing said.

"That's right," Yihe agreed. The two martial sisters picked up their weapons and extinguished the light. Then they went inside and lay down on their beds.

Linghu Chong quietly stood outside the window and his mind was in turmoil. "Why did they say my master killed their master and martial uncles? Also, why do they need to avenge their master before getting someone to receive the school's leadership? And why must they supervise little martial sister Yilin's sword training around the clock?"

He stood there thinking to himself for a long time, but he still didn't understand the reason. He slowly walked away and thought, "I'll ask martial sisters Yihe and Yiqing later."

Suddenly, Linghu Chong saw his own shadow slowly swaying. He raised his head and looked at the moon. The moon looked as if it was hanging on the tip of a tree. He

immediately thought of something and he nearly called out. He thought, "I should've realised this a long time ago. Why did they understand this matter, but I didn't?" He quickly went besides the wall of a small house and leaned on it so that the guards around the Heng-Shan School wouldn't be able to see his shadow.

When his mind became calm, he thought back to the Shaolin Temple where Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai were killed. At that time, Dingyi Shi Tai had already died, and Dingxian Shi Tai passed away straight after she had given him the leadership of the school. Dingxian Shi Tai didn't reveal who the murderer was. When he checked their bodies, there were no sign of external or internal injuries nor was there any sign of poison on the two Shi Tai's bodies. The way they died was really weird, but it was inappropriate for him to open their gowns to check more thoroughly. Later, after he had come out from Shaolin Temple, Yingying told him she opened their gowns and checked on their injuries. She saw two little holes on the skin above their hearts. It looked as if someone had used needles to pierce their hearts. At that time, he had jumped up and said: 'Poison needle? Who uses poison needles in Wulin?' and Yingying had replied: 'Daddy and Uncle Xiang's experiences are vast, but they also don't know. Daddy said that it wasn't a poisoned needle. It's actually a sharp weapon aimed at a fatal point that killed them. But the needle piercing Dingxian Shi Tai was slightly slanted.' He had said: 'Yes. When I saw Dingxian Shi Tai, she was still alive. This needle had pierced into her chest, so it wasn't done secretly, and they were actually fighting face to face. The person who killed the two Shi Tai must've been a master with high martial art.' Yingying said: 'That's what my daddy also said. Since we have this clue, it won't be hard to find out who the murderer is.' At that time, he had slapped the wall of the cave and said loudly: 'Yingying, while the two of us still have our lives, we must avenge the two Shi Tai,' and Yingying replied: 'Yes.'

Both of Linghu Chong's hands were pressed on the wall and he couldn't help shivering. He thought, "The master who is capable of killing the two Shi Tai by using a small piece of needle must either be using the Sunflower Manual or the Evil Resisting Sword Art. Dongfang Bubai had always been on top of the Dark Wood Cliff embroidering, so he couldn't be the one killing people in Shaolin Temple. Also, looking at his martial art, his needle couldn't have missed when he tried to kill Dingxian Shi Tai. Zuo Lengchan had learned the fake Evil Resisting Sword Art. At that time, martial brother Lin had only gotten the sword manual so he couldn't have learned it completely; perhaps he might not even have gotten the manual at that time..." He thought back to the snow field when he met with Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan and he thought, "That's right, at that time, Lin Pingzhi's voice hasn't changed yet. It doesn't matter if he had gotten the manual or not because he couldn't have completed his learning of the Evil Resisting Sword Art then" As he thought till here, sweat started to come out from his forehead.

At that time, the person who could use a needle to fight openly from the front and kill the two Shi Tai from Heng-Shan School must have had a martial art which was not that much higher compared to Dingxian Shi Tai because that one needle did not manage to kill her. There was only Yue Buqun who could've done it. He also thought of how Yue Buqun had deliberately planned to take the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School and had actually allowed Lao Denuo to stay inside the school for more than ten years without revealing his real identity. At the end, he allowed Lao Denuo to steal a fake sword manual and easily blinded both of Zuo Lengchan's eyes. Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai were putting all their efforts in fighting against the merger of the five schools, so Yue Buqun took the opportunity to do away with them and removed a big obstacle to the merger of the schools. This must have been the reason. Why wasn't Dingxian Shi Tai willing to reveal her murderer? It must be because Yue Buqun



was his master. If the murderer were Zuo Lengchan or Dongfang Bubai, why wouldn't Dingxian Shi Tai say it?

Linghu Chong again thought back to the day when he was inside that mountain cave having a conversation with Yingying. Yue Buqun had kicked him heavily in the Shaolin Temple, but he didn't get injured and instead Yue Buqun's leg was broken. Yingying felt this was really strange. She said her father had also thought for a long time and still could not come up with a reason. Linghu Chong had absorbed the internal energies of many people and it was true that these internal energies were enough to protect his body. But he must move these internal energies in order to harm others; unlike the completed internal energy art which was capable of countering the enemy's attack without him having to move the internal energies. As he thought of this, he realised Yue Buqun must have deliberately put on such a show for Zuo Lengchan. To make sure the leg was really broken, Yue Buqun must have used his own internal energy to break it and let Zuo Lengchan see it to show that his martial art was just average and that there was nothing to worry about so that Zuo Lengchan could go forward with his plan of the merger. Zuo Lengchan had made painstaking effort to finally merge the five schools and when it had finally happened, Yue Buqun had taken everything from him. This reasoning was not hard to understand, but no matter what was said, Linghu Chong had never have any suspicion towards his master. Perhaps, this suspicion had always been buried deep in his heart and every time he arrived at this thought, his mind immediately fled from it because he was not willing and did not dare to think about it. Only at this time when he heard Yihe and Yiqing conversing with each other that he finally could not avoid it any longer.

For his whole life, he had loved and respected his master. Unexpectedly, his master was such a person. Now he felt his life was all meaningless. At that moment, he felt he couldn't even gather enough strength to go to the Heng-Shan Other

Courtyard to take a look, so he found a secluded and calm field on the mountain and slept.

In the morning of the next day, Linghu Chong arrived at the Tong Yuan Valley when the day was already bright. He walked besides a small creek and saw his disguised form in the water's reflection. He checked his gown and shoes to see that nothing was out of place before he proceeded to the Other Courtyard. He went around the main entrance, wishing to enter from the side entrance. Just as he arrived besides the gate, he heard noises from the inside.

There were many people from inside the courtyard shouting loudly: "Really strange! Damn it, who did this?" "When did this happen? How come the gods didn't know, the ghosts didn't feel it; the hands and feet are really agile!" "These people's martial art aren't bad, how come they could be played by other people without uttering a word?"

Linghu Chong knew something strange had taken place. He stayed by the side entrance and looked inside. The courtyard and the walkways were full of people looking at the branches of a Gongsun tree. Linghu Chong lifted his head up to take a look and he also felt it very strange that his heart was also calling out like the other people in the courtyard. High on top of the tree were eight people hanging down. They were Qiu Songnian, Madam Zhang, Monk Xibao, Priest Yuling, and their other group members making seven of them, while the other person was 'Slippery and Hard to Grip' You Xun. The eight of them had apparently had their acupoints sealed and all of their limbs tied up, and they had been hung up there swinging to and fro. They were more than ten feet above the ground. Besides following the blowing of the wind, they could not move at all. All eight of them had embarrassed expressions, which were rarely seen. Two black snakes were seen slithering around their bodies, which were actually the 'Double-Snake Ruthless Beggar' Yan Sanxing's precious weapons. It was ordinary for these two snakes to be slithering about Yan Sanxing's body, but when

they were slithering about the other seven people's bodies, expressions of fear and loathing was added to the angry and ashamed appearances of these people.

Someone from the crowd leapt up. He was Night Cat 'Nothing He Can't Do' Ji Wushi. His hand was holding a dagger, and he quickly cut the bindings of 'Tung Cypress Whiz Duo'. These two people then fell from mid air and a short and stout Old Man extended his hand to stop them and put them on the ground. In just a brief moment, all eight of them had been helped down by Ji Wushi and each person had had their acupoints unsealed. Once Qiu Songnian was freed, he promptly hurled some abuses. He then saw the crowd of people were wide eyed looking at him; some were smiling, some were amazed, some were saying, "Has!", some were saying, "Plot!", some were saying, "Careful!", and some were saying, "Life!". Madam Zhang took a glance and saw there was one word written on each of Qiu Songnian's and the other six people's foreheads. The words said: 'Plot Has Been Defeated, Be Careful Worthless Life!'

The other people were alarmed and one by one they repeated, "Plot Has Been Defeated, Be Careful Worthless Life!"

Monk Xibao angrily shouted, "What plot has been defeated, your granny! Which worthless life needs to be careful?" While Priest Yuling extended his hand, spat on it, and then rubbed his forehead trying to wipe away the word.

Zhu Qianqiu said, "Brother You, how did the eight of you get captured? Can you tell us?"

You Xun smiled slightly and said, "I'm ashamed to say it, but I was sleeping peacefully last night, and didn't know how it happened. But someone sealed my acupoints and hung me from the top of the tree. That thief was most likely using the 'Five Confusion Poison' to knock us out. Otherwise, how can these brothers' skills be of no use and fell into someone's plot? How can someone so wise and brave like Priest Yuling and Madam Zhang fall into this?"

Madam Zhang snorted and said, "That must be it." She didn't want to linger and talk too much so she hastily went in to wash her face. Priest Yuling and the others also followed her in.

The crowd discussed about this and many of them were clicking their tongues feeling the incident was really strange. They all said, "You Xun's words aren't true."

Some people said, "There are dozens of people sleeping inside the hall. If they used confusion poison, then dozens of us would get it. How come only a few of them got it?"

Many people thought of the word 'Plot' from the phrase 'Plot Has Been Defeated', they didn't know what kind of plot it was pointing at so they came up with many guesses and couldn't decide which one was right. Someone said, "Which master hung these eight people on that tall tree?"

Someone laughingly answered, "Luckily the Peach Valley Six Weirdos aren't here today, otherwise it'll be so noisy here."

Another person replied, "How do you know it wasn't the Peach Valley Six Fairies who did this? Those six brothers are very eccentric. Most likely it was them who did this."

Zu Qianqiu shook his head. "No, no, it can't be."

One of the earlier person said, "Brother Zu, how do you know?"

Zu Qianqiu laughed. "Even though the Peach Valley Six Fairies' martial arts are high, their knowledge is very limited. I can guarantee you that they wouldn't even be able to write that word 'Plot'."

The crowd burst into laughter thinking what Zu Qianqiu said was right. Everyone was discussing this interesting matter and no one paid attention towards Linghu Chong who was disguised as a servant and was wearing a stupid expression. Linghu Chong thought in his heart, "What were these eight people trying to plot? It must be something harmful towards my Heng-Shan School."

After noon, on the same day, some people outside the courtyard shouted, "Weird, weird! Everyone, come have a look!" The crowd rushed out, while Linghu Chong slowly followed behind them. On the right side of the Other Courtyard there were tens of people surrounding something. The crowd quickly sprinted to go there. Linghu Chong walked near and heard some people discussing about this. There were more than ten people who were sitting on the ground facing the cliff. It was apparent their acupoints had been sealed and they were unable to move. There were eight words written on the wall of the mountain and they were the same words as before, 'Plot Has Been Defeated, Be Careful Worthless Life'.

Some people turned those people sitting on the ground around and they saw the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert were amongst them. Ji Wushi walked up to the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert and released their mute acupoints, but not the other sealed acupoints leaving them unable to move. Ji Wushi said, "There's something I don't understand here that I'd like to ask you about. I'd like to ask the two of you what kind of secret plan are you involved in? Everyone here would like to know."

"Right, right! What plot? Tell us about it," the crowd demanded.

Black Bear scolded, "Damn their eighteen ancestors. What plot? Plot their turtle sons."

"Who sealed your acupoints? Can you tell us about it?" Zu Qianqiu queried.

White Bear said, "It's good if I know. I was just walking peacefully around the mountain when my back suddenly felt numb, ambushed by that bastard. If it's a hero then he would've fought me with real sabre, real spear. Sneaking an attack behind me, what kind of person is that?"

Zu Qianqiu said, "That's fine if the two of you don't want to say it. This matter is already known to the others but I see

that there's nothing we can do about it. But I think you need to be really careful."

Someone said in a loud voice, "Brother Zu, they're not willing to disclose it, then let them stay here for three days and three nights."

Another person said, "Right, he who tied the bell on the tiger's neck is the only one to untie it\*. If you release them, that master will definitely put the blame on you, seal your acupoints, and hang you from a tree. It certainly won't be fun."

(\*The meaning of this saying is: He who caused the dispute is the only one to resolve it.)

Ji Wushi said, "What you said isn't wrong. Brothers, I'm not sitting here on the side being a spectator, I'm actually a little bit afraid."

Black Bear and White Bear looked at each other, and they were both furious. But it was pointless to start scolding, and they also didn't dare to publicly scold Ji Wushi's ancestor. Otherwise, with them still being unable to move, they wouldn't be able to fight back if the opponent wanted to be rude towards them.

Ji Wushi laughed while cupping his hands to the crowd continuously. "Everyone, please." Then he turned his body around to walk away. The people crowding around them pointed and laughed, said a few words and they also slowly walked away. Linghu Chong turned around and walked slowly. When he reached the outside of the Other Courtyard, he heard people clamouring and giggling inside. He raised his head and saw two people had been hung on the Gongsun tree again. One of them was Monk Cannot Have No Commandment and the other one was Monk No Commandment.

Linghu Chong was greatly amazed as he thought, "Great Master No Commandment is little martial sister Yilin's father, while Tian Boguang is little martial sister's disciple. The two of them would never give Heng-Shan School any trouble. If

Heng-Shan School has any problem, they would exert themselves to help. Why are they being hung on the tree?" He was really sure he knew what was going on before, but suddenly his whole idea had been turned upside down. He thought of one thing, "Great Master No Commandment is innocent like a child, he doesn't have any enmity with anyone. Why would anyone hang him from the tree? Someone must be playing a joke with him. No one here is strong enough to capture Great Master No Commandment, this must be Peach Valley Six Fairies' doing." But what Zu Qianqiu said before was very reasonable, the Peach Valley Six Fairies couldn't have written the word 'Plot'. He entered the courtyard slowly as his mind was occupied with doubts. As he entered, he saw there was a piece of yellow paper stuck to each of Monk No Commandment's and Tian Boguang's bodies. There were words written on them.

The words written on Monk No Commandment's paper were: 'World's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man.' While the words written on Tian Boguang's paper were: 'World's number one in unseemly behaviour, a person who does everything half heartedly.'

When Linghu Chong read this for the first time, he immediately thought, "These two papers are placed on the wrong persons. How come Monk No Commandment is 'a perverted and lascivious man'? This 'perverted and lascivious' words, they must surely belong to Tian Boguang. While the words 'unseemly behaviour', they must surely belong to Monk No Commandment. He's not sworn off from killing, eating meat, and he even dared to take a nun as his wife when he's a monk. These are unseemly behaviour. But this 'half heartedly' comment, where did it come from?"

But these two papers were stuck nicely to each of their necks, and it didn't look like someone had hastily stuck them wrongly. The crowd was pointing, laughing, and discussing what was going on. Many people also said, "Tian Boguang is

perverted, this is very well known in the world. How can this big monk be more perverted than he is?"

Ji Wushi and Zu Qianqiu consulted each other quietly, and both of them sensed something was fishy. They knew Monk No Commandment and Linghu Chong were very good towards each other and they must help these two people down first before discussing it further. Ji Wushi quickly leapt up the tree and cut of the ropes binding their hands and feet and released their sealed acupoints. No Commandment and Tian Boguang were both looking very dejected, unlike Qiu Songnian and Bear Duo of the Northern Desert who started hurling abuses as soon as they were released.

Ji Wushi quietly asked, "Great Master, how did you also end up like that?" But Monk No Commandment just shook his head and slowly took off the piece of paper stuck to him. He stared at the words written on it for a long time and all of a sudden, he cried.

This change was totally out of everyone's expectation. The crowd abruptly turned deathly quiet and all of them were stupefied as they gaped at him. Both of his fists were clenched as they kept on hammering his own chest; he was becoming even sadder as he cried. Tian Boguang tried to comfort him, "Grand martial master, you don't need to be sad. We lost to someone's plot, but when we find this person, we'll break his corpse into thousands of pieces..." He had not finished yet when Monk No Commandment turned around and gave him a hard slap. The palm hit Tian Boguang, forcing him to back away for more than ten feet. He staggered and had nearly fallen down. Half of his cheek had now started to become swollen.

Monk No Commandment scolded, "Smelly bastard! We were hung up here because we deserved it. You... You... You're very daring. Wanting to kill other people!"

Tian Boguang was confused when he heard Grand Martial Master said this. The person who had captured them must be someone with an impressive background that even Grand



Martial Master did not dare to offend him. So all Tian Boguang could do was agree to his Grand Martial Master. Monk No Commandment stared dumbly, and started to cry and beat on his chest again. Suddenly, he struck out again with his palm towards Tian Boguang. Tian Boguang was really fast so he quickly evaded the strike as he called out, "Grand Martial Master!"

Monk No Commandment did not chase after him even though his hit had missed. He took his hand back and with a slap, he hit a stone bench inside the courtyard, causing the crumbling stones to fly out everywhere. His left palm and his right palm struck out continuously as he started to cry again. More and more force was used with each strike. After more than ten strikes, both of his palms were covered with blood and the top of the stone bench had also crumbled to gravel. Then with a thunderous crack, the stone bench was split asunder into four pieces. The crowd was amazed and none of them dared to utter a single word. Every one of them was afraid to draw his anger onto them. Besides, whose head was stronger than that of the stone bench if Monk No Commandment were to turn to them?

Zu Qianqiu, Old Man, and Ji Wushi looked at each other and none of them knew what was happening. Tian Boguang saw something was amiss so he said, "Everyone, please look after Grand Martial Master. I'll go look for Master."

Linghu Chong pondered, "Even though I'm already disguised, little martial sister Yilin is very careful, I should be careful not to let her discover my disguise."

He had disguised himself before as a general and a farmer, but both had been male. This time around, he had disguised himself as a woman and it was actually very uncomfortable. He was not feeling very confident in the disguise and he was afraid his disguise would be revealed. So he quickly took himself inside the firewood house at the back garden, and thought, "The acupoints of the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert and the others are still being sealed. Ji Wushi

and Zu Qianqiu must be wanting to eavesdrop on what they'll be talking about at night. I should go to sleep now and wake up sometime at night to listen to what they're talking about." Linghu Chong drifted into sleep hearing Monk No Commandment's wailing. He was amazed at this but also found it funny.

When he woke up, the sky was already dark, and he went to the kitchen to look for some cold rice and tea to eat. After a long time, he heard no sound of anyone around. Thereupon, he slowly strolled around to the back of the mountain where the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert and the other people were. Linghu Chong crouched inside the underbrush far away and strained his ears to listen. Soon, he heard the breathing of people hiding in the underbrush all around him. There were at least around twenty people concealed in the underbrush. Linghu Chong found this hilarious. "Ji Wushi and the others must be wanting to eavesdrop as well. They've thought of the same thing. I guess there are many smart people here." He also thought, "Ji Wushi is good. He unsealed the mute acupoints of those two cannibals of the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, but he didn't unseal the other people's mute acupoints. Otherwise, once the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert open their mouths, they'll be told to shut up by their more competent comrades."

Linghu Chong then heard White Bear swearing continuously, "Your granny, so many mosquitoes on this mountain side. They want to suck my blood dry before they're happy. I curse the eighteen generations of your mosquitoes' ancestors."

Black Bear laughed. "The mosquitoes are stinging you only, but not me. I wonder what the reason is."

White Bear cursed, "Your blood is smelly so the mosquitoes don't want to eat it."

Black Bear laughingly replied, "I'd rather have smelly blood instead of hundreds of mosquitoes stinging me."

White Bear replied with curses. After hurling abuses for a while, White Bear said, "After my acupoints are released, the first thing I'll do is to look for Night Cat and settle our business. I'll seal that bastard's acupoints and eat the flesh from his thigh bite by bite."

Black Bear laughingly replied, "But I'd rather eat those nuns. Their skins are so white and their meat would be more tender."

White Bear said, "Mr. Yue ordered us to take those nuns to Mount Huashan, not to eat them."

Black Bear laughingly said, "There are hundreds of nuns here, Mr. Yue wouldn't know if we eat three or four of them."

Linghu Chong was greatly startled. "Master ordered them? Why did he ask them to take the Heng-Shan School's disciples to Mount Huashan? This 'Plot' must've have been this thing. But how did they get my master's order?"

Suddenly, White Bear loudly shouted, "Bastards!"

Black Bear indignantly said, "If you don't want to eat nuns then don't eat. Why do you have to scold me for?"

"I'm scolding these mosquitoes, not you," White Bear said.

Linghu Chong's mind was full of thoughts when he suddenly heard footsteps from the underbrush behind him. The footsteps slowly came near him. Linghu Chong thought, "This person had better not step on me." That person was walking straight at him and stopped right behind him before crouching down and lightly pulling on his sleeve. Linghu Chong was startled and thought, "Who's this? Did he recognise me?" Then he turned his head around. Under the blurry moonlight, he saw a beautiful round face. It was Yilin. He was startled and happy at the same time, he thought, "So my disguise has been discovered by her. Of course I wouldn't look like a woman even if I'm disguised in one."

Yilin inclined her head to a side with her little mouth pouting, and she slowly stood up. She was still pulling on his sleeve showing that she wanted to talk to him someplace

away from there. Linghu Chong followed behind her as she went towards the west. The two of them didn't say a single word as they walked. Yilin led them along a narrow strip of mountain road away from the Tong Yuan Valley. She suddenly said, "You don't listen to what other people said and come up to this troubling place again. That's very dangerous." These few words she said didn't seem to be directed to him, but it seemed like she was talking to herself.

Linghu Chong was startled and thought, "She said I don't listen to what other people said. What did she mean by that? Is she pretending, or she really doesn't recognise me?" He also thought that because Yilin had never jested with him, it was more likely that she didn't recognise him. Then he saw her turning north and gradually going towards the Porcelain Oven Pass. After going around a level area in the mountain, they arrived besides a small creek.

Yilin said, softly, "We always talk here. Are you sick of my voice?" She giggled gently and went on, "You never listen to what I say. Mute Granny, if you can really listen to what I say, I wouldn't talk to you anymore."

Yilin said this so sincerely that Linghu Chong knew she only recognised him as the Mute Granny living on the Hanging Temple. His childlike heart was roused as he thought, "I'll just play along and see what she has to say."

Yilin led him by his sleeve towards a big rock underneath a big willow tree, and sat down. Linghu Chong also sat down with his body leaning to the side and the moon behind him so Yilin couldn't take a look at his face. He thought, "Is my disguise really that good that even Yilin is fooled? It must be because it's night so it's not easy for her to recognise me. Yingying's appearance changing technique is pretty good."

Yilin gazed up at the moon and sighed. Linghu Chong desperately wanted to ask, "You're still so young, why do you have so much to worry about?" But at the end, he didn't say it out loud.

Yilin said gently, "Mute Granny, you're really good. I often pull you aside to tell you what I'm thinking, but you're never annoyed. You always listen patiently to what I have to say. I shouldn't have bothered you in the first place, but you treat me so nicely just like my own mother. I don't have a mother; if I do have a mother, would I dare to talk like this with her?"

Linghu Chong realized she was going to pour her heart out and thought it was inappropriate for him to hear it. He thought, "What kind of matter is she going to talk about? I'm deceiving her to reveal her innermost secret. I feel really apologetic to her. I should just quickly go." He immediately stood up.

Yilin pulled on his sleeve. "Mute Granny, you... you want to go?" Her voice sounded really disappointed. Linghu Chong took a glance at her and saw her face looking sad and her eyes looking like she was begging him to stay. His heart turned soft and he thought, "Little martial sister looks melancholy and she has a lot of things on her mind. If she had nowhere to vent them then they'll always be in her heart and she might become sick. I just need to listen to what she has to say and don't let her know that it's me; then she wouldn't be bashful." He slowly sat back down.

Yilin hugged his neck. "Mute Granny, how good of you to accompany me for a while. You don't know I have a lot of things in my mind."

Linghu Chong thought, "In my whole life, Linghu Chong is fated to cross paths with grannies. Earlier with Yingying, I mistakenly took her for a granny. Now, Yilin mistakenly take me for a granny. I called someone else a granny for a few hundred times, now she's calling me granny. It can be said that a good person also gets a good repayment."

Yilin said, "Today, my father nearly hanged himself to death. Do you know that? He was hung on a tree and a paper was put up on him, saying that he's 'World's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man'. In his whole life, my

father only has my mother in his heart. So how can they say he's a pervert? That person must've been confused. He must've wanted to hang that paper on Tian Boguang's body but he wrongly hung it on my father. Actually, it's not a big deal that it's mistakenly hung; just swap them. There's no need to hang himself for that."

Linghu Chong was startled but he also found this funny. "How can she say Great Master No Commandment wanted to commit suicide? She said he was nearly hanged to death, so he obviously didn't die. The words written on those two papers aren't good words, so once they're taken down, why would you put them up on themselves again? This little martial sister is really naive, she really doesn't understand how things work in the real world."

Yilin continued, "Tian Boguang hurried up to Xianxing Peak wanting to speak to me, but he met martial sister Yihe instead. She said he came up Xianxing Peak without permission, so without asking, she attacked with her sword and he almost lost his life. That was really dangerous."

Linghu Chong thought, "I once said that the men from the Other Courtyard must not go up Xianxing Peak without my permission. Brother Tian's reputation isn't good and martial sister Yihe is quick to anger, so once she saw him there, of course she'll use her sword to attack. But, Brother Tian's martial art is much higher than her so Yihe was unable to kill him." He was just about to nod his head agreeing to her when he quickly thought, "No matter what she said, whether I agree or not, I mustn't nod or shake my head. That Mute Granny wouldn't have been able to hear to what she has to say."

Yilin went on, "When Tian Boguang finally told her everything, martial sister Yihe had slashed about seventeen to eighteen moves. Luckily she held back and didn't really kill him. Once I received the news, I quickly went to Tong Yuan Valley. But I didn't see my father. I asked some people, but they all said he was inside the courtyard crying and

making a lot of noise before. He was really in a fit of anger and no one dared to talk to him. They didn't see him after that. I went around the Tong Yuan Valley trying to look for him, and finally I found him at the back of the mountain hanging high from a tree. I was really worried and quickly took him down from the tree. I saw there was a rope around his neck and it was cutting off his airway. It was really a blessing from Buddha that I arrived there in time. I helped and roused him up, then he cried hugging me. I saw there was a paper hanging on his neck, there were words written on it saying something like 'World's number one heartless man'. I said to him: 'Dad, this person is really terrible. He hung you up before, and now he hanged you. He also put up the wrong paper and didn't swap it.' My father was half crying and half saying to me: 'No one hanged me, I hanged myself. I... I don't want to live anymore.' I told him: 'Dad, that person must've suddenly sneaked an attack on you so you fell into his trap; so there's no need to be sad. Let's find and talk to him. If what he said isn't right, then we'll hang him up on a tree and put this paper around his neck.' Dad said: 'This paper is mine. How can you hang it on other people? World's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man, this is Monk No Commandment. How can other people exceed me in this? Child, you're speaking blindly.' Mute Granny, when I heard him said this, I found it really strange so I asked him: 'Dad, this paper wasn't wrongly hung?' Dad replied: 'Of course not. I... I wronged your mother, that's why I wanted to hang myself. You don't need to worry about me, I really don't want to live anymore.'"

Linghu Chong remembered Monk No Commandment had mentioned to him before that he loved Yilin's mother because she was a nun. So he became a monk because of her. Monk marrying a nun, it was really a rare and strange thing. He said that he had wronged Yilin's mother; it must be because he loved another woman later on and that was why he had admitted to being a 'heartless, perverted and

depraved man'. As he thought till here, he slowly came to understand some of these things.

Yilin said, "When I saw dad cried miserably, I also cried. Dad then advised me: 'Good child, don't cry, don't cry. If dad dies, you'll be all alone in this world. Who would take care of you?' When he said that, I cried even harder." She said until here when beads of tears dropped from her eyes. She looked really sad as she went on, "Dad said: 'Alright, alright! I won't die, but I'm really sorry about your mother.' I asked: 'How did you wrong Mother?' Dad sighed and said: 'Your mother was originally a nun, you already know about this. When I first saw your mother, I immediately fell in love with her and wanted to take her to be my wife, no matter what. Your mother said: 'Amitufo, thinking of this kind of thing, you're also not afraid of Buddha.' I said: 'If Buddha wants to blame someone, then he can blame me.' Your mother said: 'You're a lay person, it's natural for you to take a wife. My body has already been pledged to Buddhism, and I'm free from wordly desires. If I'm to be moved by worldly desires, Buddha will of course blame me. How can Buddha blame you?' I thought what she said wasn't wrong. It was me who has made up my mind to marry your mother, not your mother who wanted to marry me. How can I let Buddha blame her and put her in hell when she dies? How can I let that happen to her? That's why I went on to become a monk. Of course Buddha will blame me. If we're sent to hell then we'll go together as husband and wife.'"

Linghu Chong thought, "Great Master No Commandment is really the passionate type. He became a monk just to bear the Buddha's blame. Since he's so committed, I wonder how his heart could have changed?"

Yilin continued, "Then I asked dad: 'Did you marry mother afterwards?' Dad answered: 'Of course I did. If not, how did we get you? I shouldn't have done that, I shouldn't have. That day you were just three months old, and I was just carrying you outside the door for some sun.' I said: 'What's



wrong with getting some sun?' Dad said: 'As luck would have it, at that time, there was a good looking madam riding past the door. She saw a big monk carrying a little baby and felt it was weird. After a few glances, she praised: 'What a beautiful baby!' I felt really happy and said: 'You're also very beautiful.' That madam stared at me and asked: 'Where did you steal this baby girl from?' I said: 'What do you mean steal? She's my own baby.' That madam suddenly threw a tantrum and scolded: 'I'm asking you nicely, but you keep on teasing me. Are you tired of living?' I said: 'How did I tease you? Aren't monks people? Can't we have child? If you don't believe me, then let me give you a look.' Who could've thought that lady was so fierce, she took out the long sword slung at her back and stabbed it at me. Isn't that very unreasonable?'"

Linghu Chong thought, "Great Master No Commandment speaks frankly and everything he says are always the truth. But when other people hear it, his words become nonsense teasing. Since he's already taken a wife and gotten a baby, why didn't he turn back to be a secular man? It's neither fish nor fowl for a big monk to be carrying a little baby girl."

Yilin went on, "I said: 'This madam was too fierce. I was clearly yours, and you didn't deceive her. What was she doing stabbing a sword at you?' Dad said: 'Yes, at that time, I quickly dodged and said: 'What are you doing indiscriminately chopping your sword for? If this baby girl isn't mine, then is she yours?' That madam got even angrier and stabbed three times. She didn't manage to hit me with her sword so she thrust out even faster. Of course I wasn't afraid of her, but I was afraid she might hurt you. When she stabbed out for the eighth time, I kicked out at her and sent her somersaulting. She stopped and scolded me: 'What a shameless monk, disgraceful and nasty person, sexually harassing a lady.' It was at this time when your mother returned from the river bank after washing the clothes and she stood on the side to listen. That madam scolded me a few

more times before she angrily got on her horse and rode away. She didn't even pick up the sword she dropped on the ground. I turned my head around to talk to your mother. She didn't even reply a single word I said, but she just stood there weeping. I asked her what's the matter but she just ignored me. The morning of the next day, your mother was gone. There was a paper on the table and there were five words written on it. Can you guess what they were? They were 'Heartless man, perverted and lascivious'. I carried you everywhere to look for her, but I didn't find her.'

I said: 'Mother heard what that madam said and she believed that you really sexually harassed her.' Dad said: 'You're right, wasn't that an injustice? But later on, I thought about it and believed not all of it was injustice. Because when I saw that madam, my heart was thinking: 'This lady is good looking.' Think about it. I was already married to your mother, but my heart was still praising another woman to be pretty. Not only praising in my heart, my mouth was praising her too. Isn't that a heartless, perverted and lascivious man?'"

Linghu Chong thought, "So martial sister Yilin's mother was very jealous. Of course, this was a big misunderstanding, but wouldn't everything be alright after talking about it?"

Yilin continued, "I said: 'Did you find mother afterwards?' Dad said: 'I looked for her everywhere, but where can I find her? Your mother was a nun, so I thought she would go to a convent, so I looked in every convent. One day, I found the White Cloud Convent of Heng-Shan School. Your master Dingyi Shi Tai saw you to be very cute and she really liked you. You were also sick at that time so she told me to foster you to the Convent, so I didn't have to bring you running around and endanger your little life.'" At the mention of Dingyi Shi Tai, Yilin couldn't help crying and she said, "Since I was small, I've had no mother and Master raised me up, but Master was killed by someone, and the person who killed Master was Big Brother Linghu's Master. You see how difficult

this is. Big Brother Linghu is just like me, he's had no mother since he was small and his Master raised him. But his life is even more bitter than me, not only mother, he doesn't have a father as well. So of course he respects and loves his Master. If I kill his Master then I'll get my revenge, but Big Brother Linghu will be very sad. My dad also said: after he fostered me at the White Cloud Convent, he looked in every convent in the world. Later on, he went to Mongolia, Tibet, the frontiers, the western region, he even looked around in the poorest area. But in all that time, he didn't hear a single word of my mother. Thinking about it, my mother must've blamed my mother for sexually harassing that lady, so she committed suicide the next day. Mute Granny, when my mother became a Buddhist, she swore an oath in front of Buddha that after she entered Buddhism, she would no longer be involved in worldly desires. But in the end, she relented to father and married him. She hadn't given birth to me for long when she saw him sexually harassing a woman and got himself scolded as a 'disgraceful and nasty person', so of course she got angry. Her personality was very strong so what she believed was wrong, was wrong. So she was forced to commit suicide."

Yilin let out a long sigh and continued, "When my father explained these things, I then understood why when he saw those words 'World's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man', he became really sad. I said: 'When mother wrote those words to scold you, did you give other people a look?' Dad said: 'Of course not! I didn't even tell anyone about it. Is it honourable to tell of these kinds of things? There's something fishy here, I think it must be your mother's ghost who has found me. She seeks revenge on me for blemishing her clean reputation and sexually harassing another woman. Otherwise, how come only these eight words were written on the paper and there was nothing else on it? I know she wants my life, very good, I'm going to go with her.'

"Dad also said: 'When I couldn't find your mother, I really wished to join her in the afterworld. It's a pity I was too heavy. The rope broke after I was hanging up there for some time. I tried a second time but the rope broke again. Then I thought of getting my sabre to cut my neck. I knew for certain that sabre was on my waist, but suddenly it wasn't there. It's really not easy to die.' I said: 'Dad, you're wrong. Buddha told us not to take our own lives, that's why the rope broke and you couldn't find your sabre. Otherwise, you would've been dead when I got here.' Dad said: 'That's also good, it's most likely that Buddha is punishing me to stay in this world to receive more bitterness and not letting me to go to the afterworld so quick to see your mother.' I said: 'I thought at first that the papers on Tian Boguang and you were wrongly hanged on each other, and that was the reason why you threw a tantrum.' Dad said: 'How can they be wrongly hanged? Cannot Have No Commandment was rude to you in the beginning, isn't that called 'unseemly behaviour'? I told him to be a matchmaker to make that Linghu Chong marry you, but he always failed, isn't that called 'doing things half heartedly'? Those eight words really suit him.' I said: 'Dad, if you tell Tian Boguang to do that nonsense again, I'm going to get angry. Big brother Linghu liked his little martial sister before, now he likes the young lady Ren from the Devil Sect. Even though he treats me well, he's never put me in his heart.'"

When Linghu Chong heard Yilin said this, he felt quite apologetic toward her. She treated him in such a sentimental manner, but he had never felt it in the beginning, and it was only recently that he gradually understood her feeling. But his real feeling was said clearly by her, he first loved little martial sister and now he loved Yingying with all his heart. During the time he travelled around Jianghu, he also rarely thought of Yilin.

Yilin said, "When dad heard me said this, he got angry and scolded big brother Linghu, he said: 'That Linghu Chong,

he has eyes but he can't see, he's even worse than Cannot Have No Commandment. Cannot Have No Commandment can still see my daughter is beautiful, but Linghu Chong is the world's number one idiot.' He scolded him with so many vulgar words, they're really terrible to hear, and I also can't repeat them. He said: 'Who's the world's number one blind man? It's not Zuo Lengchan, it's Linghu Chong. Even when Zuo Lengchan's eyes are blinded, Linghu Chong is still blinder than he is.' Mute Granny, dad is very wrong to say these things, how can he scold big brother Linghu like that? I said: 'Dad, Miss Yue and young lady Ren are a hundred times more beautiful than me, how can I be better than them? Also, I've already entered Buddhism, but I still appreciate big brother Linghu risking his life to save me and helping my master. I still think about him sometimes. My mother was right, after you enter Buddhism, you should be free of wordly desires. If we're not free of those things then Buddha will punish us.'

"Dad said: 'Once you enter Buddhism, why aren't you allowed to marry? If all the women in the world entered Buddhism and they didn't marry, then there'll be no one in this world. Your mother is a nun, didn't she marry me, and didn't she give birth to you?' I said: 'Dad, let's not talk about this. I... I'd rather that mother didn't give birth to me.'" She said till here when her voice became choking. After some time, she again said, "Dad said, he's definitely going to find big brother Linghu and tell him to marry me. I was really worried, I said to him if he mentioned this to big brother Linghu, then I'll never talk to him ever again, and when he comes to Xianxing Peak, I won't see him. If Tian Boguang says this kind of nonsense thing to big brother Linghu, then I'll talk to martial sisters Yiqing and Yihe and not allow him to step foot on Mount Heng-Shan ever again. Dad knows I can get what I said so he was dumbfounded for a time. Then he just sighed and walked away. Mute Granny, dad went just like that, I wonder when I can see him again? I also don't know

whether he's going to commit suicide again? He's really making me worried. I found Tian Boguang after that and told him to go with dad and take care of him. After I finished speaking to him, I saw so many people sneaking around going outside of Tong Yuan Valley then hiding inside the underbrush. I don't know what they were doing. So I quietly followed them to have a look, but I saw you instead. Mute Granny, you don't know martial art and you also can't hear anything. It was very dangerous for you to hide in the underbrush, especially if someone sees you there. You should never go with other people to hide in the underbrush anymore. Did you think they were playing hide-and-seek?"

Linghu Chong was dangerously close to laughing, he thought, "This little martial sister is very childish, she even thinks other people are childish too."

Yilin said, "These days, martial sisters Yihe and Yiqing always supervise me practising sword. Little martial sister Qin Juan said to me, she once heard Yihe and Yiqing and a few other senior martial sisters talk with each other. They said, big brother Linghu won't agree to be Heng-Shan School's headmaster in the future. Yue Buqun is the person who killed our masters, so we naturally can't join the Five Mountains School and accept him as our headmaster. That's why everyone asked me to become the headmaster. Mute Granny, I don't believe this at all. But martial sister Qin swore on it and said that none of it is fake. She said, a few of the senior martial sisters said, from all the nuns of the Heng-Shan School's Yi generation, big brother Linghu treats me the best. If I become the headmaster, it will definitely fit the best with big brother Linghu's wish. So they decided to elect me because of big brother Linghu. They all hope I practise my swordplay well and kill Yue Buqun. Then I'll become Heng-Shan School's headmaster. No one objected to this. When she explained it like that, I believed her. But how can I become the headmaster of Heng-Shan School? My sword art wouldn't be as good as martial sisters Yihe and Yiqing even

after I've practised it for ten more years. As for killing Yue Buqun, it's even more impossible. I was already confused in the beginning, so when I thought of this, my mind is in even more chaos. Mute Granny, what do you think I should do?"

Linghu Chong had now understood. "So they supervise her practising sword from day to night hoping that she would take my position later on and become the Heng-Shan School's headmaster. This is very good for me since they've thought about this so thoroughly."

Yilin quietly said, "Mute Granny, I often tell you, I think of Big Brother Linghu during the day, and I also thought of Big Brother Linghu during the night. Even my dreams are of him. I dreamt of him saving me and not even caring for his own life; Dreamt of him after he was injured and I carried him to run away; Dreamt of him jesting to me wanting me to tell him some stories; Dreamt of him in Hengshan at that Jade House, I... I... slept on the same bed with him, sharing the same quilt. Mute Granny, I know you can't hear me, that's why I'm not shy to talk to you of these things. If I don't say these things and always keep them in my heart, I'll go mad. I talk to you of these things, and just lightly call out Big Brother Linghu's name, then my heart will be at peace for a few days." She stopped for a time, then lightly called out, "Big Brother Linghu, Big Brother Linghu!" These two cries contained the deep lovesick emotion she felt, Linghu Chong could not help tremble when he heard them. He already knew this little martial sister treated him very nicely, but he never thought she would have such a deep feeling towards him. He thought, "She treats me so passionately, how can Linghu Chong repay this to her in this life?"

Yilin lightly sighed. "Mute Granny, dad doesn't understand me. Martial Sister Yihe and Yiqing, they also don't understand me. I thought of Big Brother Linghu, only because I could not forget him. I know this is unseemly. I've already entered Buddhism and have become a nun, so how can I think of a man night and day? Moreover, he is our

school's current headmaster. Everyday, I ask for Guanyin to help me, I ask Buddha to help me forget Big Brother Linghu. When I was reading scripture early this morning, I read of the Buddha's name who helped the people in the world so I asked the Buddha in my heart to protect Big Brother Linghu from harm, to turn trouble to luck, to bless him and young lady Ren to make a blessed match and keep each other company till they're old, and to be happy for all their life. I suddenly thought, why did I make so many wishes to Buddha? When Buddha hear them, won't Buddha feel annoyed? So from today onwards, I'll only pray to Buddha to bless Big Brother Linghu's life with carefree. He loves to be carefree, with no restraint or control, but hoping that young lady Ren doesn't control him in the future." She was quiet for a little while before slowly continuing, "We believe in the Goddess of Mercy who helps the people around the world."

After reciting more than ten phrases, she raised her head and gazed at the moon, and said, "I must go back, you should go back too." From inside her bosom, she took out two buns and put them in Linghu Chong's hand. "Mute Granny, why didn't you look for me today? Are you sick?" After a time, looking that Linghu Chong was not answering, she spoke to herself, "You also can't hear, but I keep on asking you. I'm really foolish." She slowly turned around and went.

Linghu Chong, sitting on the rock, looked at her disappearing into the darkness. Every sentence that she just told him was still flowing around his mind, stirring his heart, making it difficult for him to think and he could not help feeling sentimental. After some time, he incidentally took a glance at the water in the creek and he was startled. He saw that there were two reflections sitting side by side on the rock. He thought it was just a trick his eyes were playing because of the way the water rippled. But after taking another look, there were really two reflections. All of a sudden, his back was covered in cold sweat and his whole



body became stiff. How would he dare to turn his head around?

From looking at the reflection on the water, that person was sitting just two feet away behind his back and with only one hit, that person would have been able to take his life. But in his shock, he did not move forward. This person had silently come to his back without him feeling anything. It was very difficult to say how high exactly this person's martial art was. A thought flashed in his mind, "Ghost!" but thinking of ghost, his heart became even more frightened. After being stupefied for a long time, he took a look at the water again. The creek water was flowing, and under the moonlight, he could not see clearly the reflection on the water. But he saw the two reflections were identical to each other, and both were wearing the wide gowns of women. Even the buns on top of their hair were the same. The other person was just like his own incarnation. Linghu Chong was even more frightened now that even his heart had seemed to skip a beat. Suddenly, without knowing where the courage came from, he abruptly turned his head around to face that 'ghost'. After looking clearly, he could not help drawing a breath of cold air. He saw a middle aged woman and recognised her to be the deaf and mute servant on that hanging temple. But it was really strange that he was unaware of her arriving behind him. As his fear subsided, his astonishment was not reduced in the slightest bit. He said, "Mute Granny, so... so it's you, you've... you've really scared me to death." But he heard his own voice was trembling and hoarse. He then saw the hairpin on the Mute Granny's bun, and the light gray gown she was wearing, they were all unexpectedly completely the same as to what he was wearing. He paused for a tick then laughed loudly and said, "Don't be offended. Young lady Ren remembered really well, she remembered what you were wearing and dressed me up like this. We're just like twin sisters."

He saw the wooden expression of Mute Granny. There was not a trace of anger or happiness. He did not know what she was thinking about, so he pondered, "This person is really weird. Since she already saw me disguising as herself, I shouldn't stay here any longer." He immediately stood up and folded his hands towards Mute Granny. "The night is late, so I'm going to take my leave." He turned around towards the road to go away. Just as he walked for only seven to eight steps, he saw the Mute Granny blocking the road in front of him. He did not know how she moved, but she had moved noiselessly without any trace or shadow in front of him. When he was fighting the lightning quick and unbelievably fast Dongfang Bubai, he was still able to see his shape and form. But this Mute Granny was just like she sprouted out of the ground. Even though her movement was not as quick as Dongfang Bubai, her noiseless movement was like that of ghosts.

Linghu Chong was greatly astonished as he knew that tonight he had met a master. He had disguised himself as her without asking for her permission, so of course it was unavoidable that she would be angry. He again saluted her deeply and said, "Granny, I've offended you. I'll immediately change my clothing, then I'll come to the Hanging Temple to apologise." That Mute Granny still wore her wooden expression and was not showing the slightest sign of anger on her face.

"Oh, yes!" Linghu Chong exclaimed. "You can't hear what I'm saying."

He then stooped down to write on the ground: "I'm sorry, I won't do it again." When he stood back up, he saw she was still standing there expressionless without giving a glance at the words written on the ground. Linghu Chong pointed at the words written on the ground and in a loud voice said, "I'm sorry, I won't do it again!" That Mute Granny didn't even move a muscle. Linghu Chong bowed to her continuously with his hands folded. At the same time, he was undoing his

clothing and his hair. But that granny stayed quiet without saying a single word for the whole time.

Linghu Chong did not know what to do anymore as he scratched his head. "You don't understand. I don't know what else to do." He leaned to one side as he tried to go around that granny. But as soon as his left foot moved, that granny moved slightly to block his way forward. Linghu Chong sucked in a breath and said, "Sorry for the offence!" as he strode to the right and all of a sudden, he stepped back and flew past from the left. Just as his left foot touched the ground, that granny was already in front of him blocking his way forward again. He tried to run away a few more times, and each time, he was getting faster and faster. But that granny kept up with him and blocked his way forward for the whole time. He was now feeling worried.

He extended his left hand out to push at her shoulder. That granny chopped down with her right palm, aiming at his right wrist. Linghu Chong hastily withdrew his hand. He knew that he was at a disadvantage so he didn't dare to fight with her. The only thing he hoped for was to get away as quickly as possible so he lowered his head to charge at a side of her body. But he had just shaped to move when he suddenly felt the wind from her palm strike. That granny had already sent her palm towards the top of his head.

Linghu Chong quickly dodged by slanting his body to one side. But this palm strike was very quick, and with a clap, his shoulder was hit. That granny also faltered as she hit him. This was because Linghu Chong's 'Art of Essence Absorbing' had reacted in response to the strike and it had actually absorbed the power in that palm strike. That granny hastily extended her left hand in a claw, which was looking thin and sharp, at his eyes.

Linghu Chong was greatly startled, and he quickly lowered his head to avoid it. A moment later, the clothes at his back was ripped. Fortunately, that granny was also afraid of his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' so she did not make use of

that advantage to hit him. She bent her right arm, and in an uppercut, she again tried to dig his eyes out. It was obvious she had come up with a plan to attack his eyes only. Because no matter how formidable his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' was, once her fingers entered his eyes, he would still be blinded. Besides, the soft eyes would also not be able to absorb other people's internal power. Linghu Chong extended his arm to block the strike. That granny followed it by turning her palm around, and used her five fingers to grab at his left eye. Linghu Chong hastily extended his left hand to block, but that granny's right hand had flown out to grab at his right ear. He leapt away quickly. Each move was strange and peculiar, and they seemed like the movements that a farm woman might use to fight someone. But these movements were fiercer and faster. In the next few moves, Linghu Chong had been forced to retreat continuously. That granny's martial art was actually not that high. She was merely able to walk silently and did a sneak attack rapidly. In reality, her martial art was far inferior to Yue Buqun, Zuo Lengchan, and even Yingying's martial art was much higher than hers. But Linghu Chong's punching and kicking martial arts were very lacking. If it was not for the fact that the granny was protecting herself from his 'Art of Essence Absorbing', and did not dare to clash with his arms and legs, Linghu Chong would have been hit a long time ago.

After a few more moves, Linghu Chong knew it would be hard to escape if he did not draw his sword out. He immediately put his hand inside his bosom to take his short sword out. His right hand had just touched the handle of his sword when that granny executed her lightning quick attacks. In the subsequent seven to eight attacks, Linghu Chong had to block with both of his hands and had no time to draw his sword out. That granny's attacks were getting fiercer and more violent. There was clearly no enmity or hatred between them, but it was obvious she really wanted to dig his eyes out. Linghu Chong gasped loudly. He used his

left palm to cover up both of his eyes, while he again put his right hand into his bosom to take his sword out. Disregarding the hit he took from her palm and kick, he finally managed to grab his short sword.

At this moment, his head was hurting as his hair was grabbed and both his feet were lifted off the ground. The next moment, the sky was revolving and the ground was spinning as his body was being flung around in mid air. That granny had grabbed his hair in order to fling him away. So he was now being spun around quicker and quicker.

"Oi, oi," Linghu Chong worriedly called out. "What are you doing?"

He flung his arms around trying to grab her arms. Suddenly, his left and right armpits felt numb as the acupoints there were sealed by her. Next, the acupoints on his back, the back of his waist, chest, and neck were all sealed by her. His whole body now felt numb and he was completely immobilized. But that granny still did not stop whirling his body around. Now, Linghu Chong could only hear the whirring sound of the wind and he thought, "I've met with countless marvel in my life. But I've never been made into a big top for someone to play with before."

That granny spun him around until he was feeling very dizzy. She finally stopped and let him fall heavily on the ground.

Linghu Chong of course knew there was no enmity between him and that granny. But when at this time she toyed with him until he was half dead, he couldn't help feeling angry. He scolded, "Stinky granny! You don't know what's good for you. If I'd gotten my sword out, you'd have a body full of holes a long time ago!"

That granny looked at him with her cold eyes. Her face remained expressionless, with no trace of happiness or anger at all. Linghu Chong thought, "I can't beat her. But if I don't scold her then my loss would be too great. But I've been

subdued by her now, so if she knows I was scolding her, then she'll make things difficult for me."

He immediately thought of an idea to prevent the granny from knowing that he was scolding her. He started giggling and scolded, "Bastard granny, stinky granny, the gods know your heart is bad. That's why they made you deaf and mute, can't smile, can't get angry. You're just like an idiot. Might as well become a dog or a pig. They might even be better than you." His scold was becoming more and more malicious, while his face was grinning from ear to ear. At first, his smile was just fake to prevent the granny from knowing that he was scolding her. But at the end, after looking at the granny's expressionless face, he considered his plan had succeeded so he couldn't help feeling proud of himself. He was now laughing heartily.

That granny slowly walked up to his side, grabbed his hair, and dragged him along the ground. Her pace gradually became faster. Although Linghu Chong's acupoints had been sealed, he had not lost consciousness. His whole body was aching from the friction and the collision from the ground. His mouth was continuously scolding, but he could not laugh anymore now.

That granny was dragging him along the path going up the mountain. Linghu Chong took a look at the lay of the land from the corner of his eyes. He saw her turning westward and she was actually going to the Hanging Temple. At this time, Linghu Chong had already guessed that Monk No Commandment, Tian Boguang, Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, Qiu Songnian, and the rest of those people were most likely subdued by her. Besides her, there was no one else who could do those strange and sudden movements, which the gods doesn't know and the ghosts can't feel, to suddenly subdue people. But he had once gone to the Hanging Temple and had seen it with his own eyes that this mute and deaf granny had no senses, and could even be said to be slow-witted. Even masters like Great Master Fangzheng, Priest

Chongxu, Yingying, and Shangguan Yun did not suspect her when they saw her. This mute granny was really very good in concealing her martial ability.

His thought continued, "If this granny hang me up high on the Gongsun tree at Tong Yuan Valley, then put a paper on me that says I'm the world's number one pervert, I'd lose a lot of face since I'm acting as the Heng-Shan School's headmaster and I'm also wearing a woman's gown. Lucky she's dragging me to the Hanging Temple instead. I guess it doesn't matter if she just hangs me here for some time and not out in the open." Even though he had suffered a bad luck tonight, he was not going to be hung high above the Heng-Shan Other Courtyard, so he still considered it to one lucky thing from this big disaster he was facing. He also thought, "I wonder if she knows my real identity. Would she give me a special treatment if she knows I'm the Headmaster of Heng-Shan?"

Along the road up, his body bumped against countless numbers of rocks causing a lot of injuries. Luckily, his face was facing up so there was no injury to his five senses. When they arrived at the Hanging Temple, that granny dragged him straight up to the highest chamber of the Spirit Turtle pavilion.

"Aiyo, this is bad!" Linghu Chong called out.

Outside the chamber of the Spirit Turtle was the flying bridge, which was looking down at a ten thousand feet deep abyss. He was afraid that granny was going to hang him there. This Hanging Temple was rarely visited by people. If this granny hanged him there, it would be unavoidable that he'd starve to death. This turn of event was far from good.

That granny released him in the middle of the chamber, then she went below. Linghu Chong was lying down on the floor thinking of the background of this despicable granny. He unexpectedly couldn't think of any clue regarding her origin at all, but he conjectured that she must be a famous senior of the Heng-Shan School, someone like Yu Sao who

probably attended people like Dingjing and Dingxian Shi Tai back then. As he thought till here, he felt relieved: "Since I'm the Headmaster of Heng-Shan, whatever anger she has towards me, she won't give me too much difficulty." But as he mulled over it, he thought, "I've already disguised myself like this. I'm afraid she won't recognise me. If she thought I was in collusion with Madam Zhang, deliberately dressing up like her and sneaking around in Heng-Shan. She'll definitely give me something 'special', and make me suffer even more. What a disaster."

He didn't hear the footsteps going up the stairs as that granny came back up. In her hand was a rope to tie Linghu Chong's hands and feet. She then took out a piece of yellow paper out of her bosom and stuck it on his neck. Linghu Chong was really curious to see what was written on that paper. But at this time, both of his eyes were blinded as a black cloth was put over them. Linghu Chong was thinking, "This granny is quite smart. She knows I'd want to look at that paper, but she's not giving me a look." He also thought, "Linghu Chong is a world's famous loafer so the words written on that paper must be something awful. I don't need to see them to know what they are."

He felt his wrists and ankles tightened as his body soared up high into the air. Now, he was hanging up high from the beam. This fuelled his anger even more and he started hurling abuses. He always loved to play around, but he was actually also very careful. His heart pondered, "I would never be able to escape no matter how much I swear at her. I must slowly move my inner energy to break through the acupoints, and wait till I get my sword then I'll stop her. Then I'll hang her up and hang a paper on her neck. Hmm, what should I write on that paper? World's number one evil granny! Not good calling her world's number one. She might get happy instead. I'll write 'World's number eighteen evil granny'. Let her rack her brain figuring out who those seventeen evil grannies in front of her are." He turned his head to a side to



listen, but he couldn't hear any breathing at all. That granny had gone down the chamber.

After hanging up there for two hours, Linghu Chong became hungry and his stomach started growling in protest. But he was secretly happy as he had gradually broken through his blocked acupoints. Suddenly, his body swayed and he fell on the floor with a booming sound. It was that granny who had loosened the ropes tying him up, but he couldn't perceive at all when she had come back in. That granny pulled open his blindfold. However, he had not broken through the acupoint on his neck so he couldn't look down to see what was written on that paper. But he could see the last word written on that paper was the character 'granny'. He quietly called out, "This is bad!" In his heart, he was thinking that this 'granny' character she had written must be because she thought he was a woman. If she had written that he was a pervert or a loafer, it did not matter. But to regard him as a woman, then it was a really big concern for him.

He saw that granny took a bowl from the table, and he thought, "Is she giving me soup or water to drink? It's best if she's giving me wine!"

All of a sudden, his whole head was warm and he cried out, "Aiyo!" That bowl was filled up with hot water, which was now dripping from his head. Linghu Chong scolded, "Stinking granny, what are you doing?" Linghu Chong was greatly startled when he saw her took out a razor from her bosom. The next moment, he heard scraping sound and his scalp hurt a little. That granny was actually shaving his head.

Linghu Chong was alarmed and angry, he didn't know what this crazy granny was up to. Not long after, the hair on his whole head was shaved clean and he thought, "Oh well, Linghu Chong will become a monk from today. Aiyo, that's not right, I'm wearing a woman's dress so I'm going to become a nun." His heart suddenly trembled and he thought, "Yingying was joking that I should disguise as a nun. If that

prophecy becomes reality, then it'll be a big disaster. Maybe this evil granny already knows who I am, and she believes that a man becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster is very inappropriate. She might not even just shave my head, she might even... even castrate me so I'll become just like Cannot Have No Commandment. That way I won't be able to dirty the sacred ground of Buddha. This woman is so insanely loyal to Heng-Shan School, she's even willing to do anything. Aiyo, today, Linghu Chong has met with a big misfortune. 'To dominate Wulin, scatter your sword and castrate yourself', it's still best if I don't learn that Evil Resisting Sword Art."

When that granny finished shaving his head, she swept the hair on the ground. Linghu Chong believed the situation was urgent so he hastily moved his inner energy to fiercely break through his sealed acupoints. He had just felt that a few of his acupoints was loosened when suddenly his back, waist, and shoulder's acupoints were again sealed by her. Linghu Chong let out a long sigh, and he didn't even feel like swearing at that granny again.

That granny took down the paper on his neck and put it to the side. Linghu Chong took a look and saw that the words written on that paper were: "World's number one blind man, not male not female evil granny." He secretly cried out in misery, "So this granny is pretending to be deaf and mute. She actually heard everything. If not, how could she have known Monk No Commandment calling me world's number one blind man? She was probably eavesdropping when Monk No Commandment was talking to his daughter, or maybe when Yilin was talking to me. She might even be eavesdropping on both times." He cried out, "No need to pretend anymore, you're not deaf." But that granny was still not paying him any attention as she opened up his gown. Linghu Chong was startled and he called out, "What are you doing?" A ripping sound was heard. That granny had torn apart the female gown he was wearing into two and taken it down.

Linghu Chong called out in alarm, "If you injure a hair on my body, I'll make mince meat out of you." Then he thought, "She's only shaven my whole head, but how can she stop at only that?"

That granny took a small piece of grindstone, wet it, and sharpened her razor. She extended her finger to test out the razor's edge. Satisfied with its sharpness, she put it aside and took out a porcelain bottle from her bosom. On the bottle was written: 'Heavenly Connecting Glue'. When Linghu Chong was injured, he had used Heng-Shan School's medicine countless times. So he recognised the bottle without having to look at the writing on it. He also knew the other medicine called 'White Cloud Bear Gall Bladder Pill' which was used to treat internal injuries. Sure enough, that granny took out another porcelain bottle from her bosom and it was the 'White Cloud Bear Gall Bladder Pill'. That granny then took out some white cloths from inside her bosom, which were actually bandages. Linghu Chong's old wounds were already healed and he had no other new injuries. The way this granny had arranged everything, it seemed that she was going to make one or two new injuries on his body. He couldn't help sighing in misery.

Once that granny finished her preparation, she gazed at Linghu Chong. After a while, she lifted his body and put him on top of a table. Her expression was wooden once again. Linghu Chong had undergone many battles, and even when his body got injured heavily or when he was surrounded by powerful enemies, he was never afraid. But at this time, when facing an old granny, he actually felt unspeakable fear in his heart.

That granny slowly picked up the razor. Light glinted off the face of the razor. Linghu Chong's forehead was covered in cold perspiration which dripped down onto his gown. Suddenly, a thought flashed in his mind, and without thinking he blurted out, "You're Monk No Commandment's wife!"

That granny trembled and took a step back. "How -- Do -- You -- Know?" Her voice was dry and grating. She paused after every word, just like a kid who has just learnt to utter his first words.

When Linghu Chong said that, he had not thought of what he was saying. Now that she was asking him, he was asking himself how he knew.

"Hng," he coldly snorted. "Of course I know. I knew about it a long time ago." But in his heart, he was thinking quickly, "How did I know? How did I know? Oh, the paper she hanged on Monk No Commandment had the words: 'World's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man'. This 'heartless' and 'perverted and lascivious' criticism, besides Monk No Commandment, the only other person who would know about it, would be his own wife." Then he loudly said, "You still care so much for that heartless, perverted, and lascivious man. Otherwise, when he hanged himself, why did you cut off the rope? When he wanted to cut his throat, why did you take away his sabre? With this kind of heartless, perverted, and lascivious man, isn't it better to just let him die?"

That granny coldly replied, "Let him -- Die -- So fast? How can -- It be -- That easy -- For him?"

"That's right," Linghu Chong replied. "Letting him worried for these last fifteen years. Searching for you from the pass all the way to Tibet, from the northern desert to the western region, searching for you in every single nunnery. But you're actually hiding here enjoying life, that can be regarded as not easy for him!"

"He -- Deserves it," that granny answered. "He's already taken me as his wife. Why -- Did he flirt with other women?"

"Who said he was flirting?" Linghu Chong inquired. "She was looking at your daughter, and he was looking at her. What's wrong with that?"

"Once you're married, looking at other women is not permitted," the granny retorted.

Linghu Chong felt this woman was very unreasonable, so he argued, "You're already married, why are you looking at other men?"

"When did I look at other men?" that granny angrily replied. "Nonsense!"

"Aren't you looking at me now? Am I not a man?" Linghu Chong replied. "Monk No Commandment only looked at some women. But you actually shaved my head off and touched it. Let me tell you, we're not related but you actually touched my skin, and violated the rules and regulations. Luckily you only touched my head and didn't touch my face, otherwise, Guanyin will definitely not spare you." He was thinking this woman rarely went out to the real world so she wouldn't understand about worldly matters. So he was trying to scare her off to avoid being cut up by her.

"I don't need to touch you to cut off your arms, legs, and head," the granny replied.

"Want to behead me. By all means, do as you please."

That granny coldly laughed. "You want me to kill you? It's not as easy as that. You now have two choices in front of you, you can choose for yourself. The first choice is for you to quickly take Yilin as your wife and stop breaking her heart. If you don't agree then I'm going to castrate you and make you become not male not female weirdo. If you don't take Yilin as your wife, then you can't marry another shameless and bad woman." She had been pretending to be deaf and mute for more than ten years already, and had not spoken for a long time. That was why her tongue wasn't fluid in the beginning, but after talking for some time, her speech was now fluent.

"Yilin is definitely a good lady, but does that make all the other ladies in this world to be a shameless and bad woman?" Linghu Chong inquired.

"Not far off, good is good no matter where they go. So do you agree or not? Quickly say it."

"Little martial sister Yilin is my good friend. If she finds out you're forcing me like this, she'll be angry."

"She'll be very happy once you've taken her as your wife," that granny said. "All her anger would be gone."

"She's a Buddhist and she's already sworn not to get married," Linghu Chong argued. "Once she's moved by worldly desires, she'll be blamed by Buddha."

"If you become a monk, Buddha won't blame her alone. Do you think I shaved your head for nothing?"

Linghu Chong couldn't help laughing out loud. "So you shaved my head wanting me to become a monk and take a nun as my wife. Your husband did this before, so you want me to learn from him."

"That's right," she answered.

"There are so many bald headed person in this world, " Linghu Chong laughingly said. "It doesn't mean you're a monk when your head is shaved."

"That can be easily fixed," that granny replied. "I'll just burn some incense marking on your head. A bald head doesn't mean you're a monk. But a bald head with some incense marking is definitely a monk." As she finished talking, she immediately wanted to take action.

"Slow down, slow down," Linghu Chong hastily interrupted. "To become a monk requires that person's willingness, how can it be forced?"

"You don't want to become a monk," that granny concluded. "Then be a eunuch."

Linghu Chong thought, "This granny is insane. She must get whatever she wants. I must delay her first." He said, "If I suddenly changed my mind to marry little martial sister Yilin after you made me a eunuch, what happens then? Wouldn't you have harmed the two of us then?"

"For us martial people, we do things openly and quickly," that granny angrily said. "Once you said what you want to do, how can you still be in two minds or change your mind? A monk then be a monk, a eunuch then be a eunuch! How can a gentleman be so loathsome?"

"Once I'm a eunuch, I'm not a gentleman anymore," Linghu Chong laughingly said.

"We're discussing a serious matter here," that granny angrily replied. "Who's joking around with you?"

Linghu Chong thought, "Little martial sister Yilin is beautiful and gentle, and she also has a deep feeling towards me. But my heart has belonged to Yingying a long time ago, so how can I just forget about that? This granny is so unreasonable. A gentleman would rather die than bend." So he said, "Granny, I want to ask you something. What do you think of a man who's not loyal to his lover and plays around with woman all the time?"

"Why do you even need to ask?" that granny questioned. "This sort of person is worse than a pig, a dog. A useless and selfish man."

"You're right," Linghu Chong agreed. "Little martial sister Yilin is beautiful and she treats me very nicely. But why didn't I take her as my wife? It's because I've already had a marriage agreement with another lady a long time ago. This lady treats me so kindly. Alright, Linghu Chong will just give you his body for you to chop up, but I won't disappoint her. If I disappoint her, won't I become the world's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man? Then Linghu Chong would've taken Monk No Commandment's title of 'world's number one'."

"This lady, she's the devil sect's young lady Ren. She was the one who saved you when you were surrounded by the devil sect here on that day, is that right?" the granny asked.

"That's right," Linghu Chong answered. "You've seen this young lady Ren."

"That's very easy," the granny said. "I'll just ask young lady Ren to dump you, then you can say that she was heartless towards you, not you being heartless towards her. That's settled then."

"She would never dump me," Linghu Chong said. "She's willing to give her life for me, I'm also willing to give my life

for her. I'll never be heartless towards her, and she'll never be heartless towards me either."

"I'm afraid matter has come to a head and it's not up to her," that granny said. "Heng-Shan Other Courtyard is full of those stinking men, she can pick any one of them and marry him."

"NONSENSE!" Linghu Chong angrily shouted.

"You're saying I can't do that?" that granny asked as she walked out the door. He heard the door to the next chamber opened, and that granny came back in again. She was carrying a woman with both her hands and legs tied. That woman was Yingying. Linghu Chong was greatly startled, he never expected that Yingying would also fall into this granny's hand. When he saw there was no injury on her body, he felt relieved.

"Yingying," Linghu Chong called out. "You've also come."

Yingying smiled and said, "I've heard everything. You said you'd never be heartless towards me, I'm very happy to hear it."

"In front of me, you're not allowed to say those shameless things!" the granny shouted. "Little miss, do you want a monk or a eunuch?"

Yingying blushed furiously and replied, "Your words are really not good to hear."

"I've thought of this carefully, I want this little kid Linghu Chong to abandon you and marry Yilin," that granny said. "But he has decided that he is not willing."

"Since the moment you open your mouth, this is the most reasonable thing I've heard," Linghu Chong loudly acclaimed.

"So I'll have to back off for a step and give in to this little kid Linghu Chong," that granny said. "I'm going to let him marry both of you. He can become a monk and marry both of you; If he were to become a eunuch, he won't be able to marry at all. But after you're married, you mustn't bully my daughter. Both of you can be on the same level, there's no



need to decide who's going to be first or second. You're older by a few years only so Yilin can call you big sister."

"I..." Linghu Chong only managed to utter this word before that granny sealed his speech acupoint. That granny also sealed Yingying's speech acupoint, then she said, "I've already decided everything and I can't allow the two of you to make it go astray. I'm already letting you little monk to take two lovely and beautiful wives, what else is there to say? Hng, that bald No Commandment, how useless! Seeing his daughter getting lovesick but can't do anything. But when I get involved, everything's solved straight away." When she finished speaking, she flew out of the chamber.

Linghu Chong and Yingying were smiling bitterly at each other. They couldn't speak to each other and they also couldn't hold each other's hand. At this time, the morning sun was just beginning to ascend and its light shining in through the window. Linghu Chong squinted his eyes at her. The red candle on the table had not extinguished yet and its flame was still flickering, with its light smoke floating past Yingying's white as jade face, making her looking even more beautiful. He saw her eyes were looking at the razor on the ground, then they shifted towards the bottle and the bandages on the table, while her face was showing a mocking look. It was obvious she was teasing him: 'How dangerous, how dangerous!' But her expression quickly changed and she lowered her head with her whole face blushing red. He knew this kind of matter should not be said out loud, and it shouldn't even be thought of.

Linghu Chong saw her looking lovable and bashful, like she had just been caught red-handed doing something embarrassing. He couldn't help feeling moved and thinking, "If I were free, I'd have gone there and given her a hug and a kiss."

He then saw her slowly lifted her head up and their gazes met. She immediately averted her eyes. The redness in her cheeks was just disappearing when her whole face and ears

went crimson again. Linghu Chong thought, "My feelings toward Yingying are definitely firm and unwavering. That evil granny is forcing me to marry little martial sister Yilin so to save myself, I'm forced to go along with her for now. But wait until she release my acupoint and I have a sword in my hand, does she think I'll be afraid of her? Even though this evil granny's fist and kicking martial arts are good, she's still far below Zuo Lengchan and Chief Ren. Her swordplay is definitely not my match. She won only through her light hands and legs, going and leaving without any noise, and ambushing me. If it was a real fight, Yingying will surely beat her, and Great Master No Commandment will also be stronger her."

When he finished with his thought, he looked around and saw Yingying was again looking at him. This time, she didn't become shy. It was obvious she was not thinking of that eunuch matter anymore. He saw her eyes were looking up and the corner of her mouth was turned up smiling. She was smiling at his bald head, so she wasn't thinking of the eunuch matter anymore but now she was laughing at him becoming a monk. Linghu Chong laughed but no sound was coming out. But Yingying was becoming even happier with her smile getting bigger.

Suddenly, she rolled her eyes revealing a crafty expression on her face. Her left eye winked once, twice. Linghu Chong had not understand her meaning when she again winked twice. He thought, "She winked twice, what's her meaning? Ah, that's right, she's laughing at me for taking two wives." He immediately wiped out the smiling expression on his face. With a very solemn expression, he winked once with his left eye. His meaning was: 'I will only take you as wife, my heart is not divided in two.' Yingying slightly shook her head and her left eye winked twice again. Her meaning was: 'Marrying two then it'll be two wives!' Linghu Chong again shook his head and winked his left eye once. He had wanted to shake his head more vigorously to

show his determination, but most of his body's acupoints were still sealed so he couldn't use any power. Now, his face was looking angry but he was actually very sincere. Yingying slightly nodded. But when her gaze caught the razor, she again shook her head.

Linghu Chong gazed at her. Yingying's eyes slowly shifted and they were now locking eyes. The two of them were separated by more than ten feet but their four eyes were talking. All of a sudden, their hearts were intertwined and there was no need to speak, they both understood what was inside the other's heart. Whether he married Yilin or not was insignificant. Whether he became a monk or a eunuch was insignificant. Whether the two of them live or die did not matter. With their two hearts becoming one, they were both satisfied. This moment was theirs forever. Even if the sky collapsed or the ground split, this moment would never be taken away or forgotten.

The two of them gazed at each other. Without knowing how much time had passed, they suddenly heard footsteps coming up the stairs. They woke up from their intertwined feelings and unbounded emotion. The crisp and clear voice of a young lady was heard saying, "Mute granny, what are you taking me here?" It was Yilin's voice. They heard her coming in to the other chamber and sat down. That granny was obviously accompanying her but her footsteps could not be heard at all. After some time, they heard that granny slowly said, "Don't call me mute granny, I'm not mute."

Yilin shrieked in alarm. She was extremely confounded and tremblingly said, "You... you... you're not... not mute? You're alright?"

"I was never mute before," that granny said.

"Then... then you were never deaf before, you... you could hear... what I said?" Yilin inquired. She sounded really appalled.

"Child, what are you afraid of?" the granny asked. "Isn't it better that I can hear what you said?"

Linghu Chong heard her tone was gentle and intimate as she talked to her own daughter. At the end, her tender affection towards Yilin was evident.

But Yilin was still frightened as she tremblingly said, "No, no! I'm going now!"

"Sit for a while," that granny implored. "I have something important to talk to you."

"No, I... I don't want to listen," Yilin protested. "You tricked me. I've always thought you couldn't hear. I... I talked to you about those things. You tricked me." Her voice was choking, and she was so worried that she finally cried.

That granny lightly patted her shoulder and softly said, "Good child, don't worry. I wasn't tricking you. I was afraid you'll get sick from keeping all your feelings in, so I let you speak it out so your heart will lighten somewhat. When I arrived at Heng-Shan, I've always disguised myself as a deaf and a mute, and no one knows about it. I wasn't deliberately tricking you."

Yilin sobbed sadly. That granny softly continued, "I have something very good to talk to you, you'll be really happy when you hear it."

"Is it about my dad?" Yilin asked.

"Your dad? Hng, I don't care about him," the granny answered. "It's about your big brother Linghu."

"Don't you mention... mention him," Yilin pleaded. "I'll never mention him to you ever again. I'm going to read the scriptures!"

"No, wait a second and hear me first," the granny said. "Your big brother Linghu told me he loves you very much. He loves you ten times more compared to that young lady Ren from Devil Sect."

Linghu Chong and Yingying shared a look and they were scolding in their heart, "Stinky granny, telling such a huge lie!"

Yilin let out a long sigh and softly replied, "You don't need to deceive me. When I first know him, big brother

Linghu only loved his little martial sister. He loved her with all his heart, and she was the only one in his heart. Later, his little martial sister ignored him and married another person. Then he only loves young lady Ren, and he also loves her with all his heart and young lady Ren is the only one in his heart." Linghu Chong and Yingying looked at each other and their hearts were filled with unbounded sweetness.

"Actually, he's always liked you in secret," that granny said. "But you're a Buddhist and he's the Heng-Shan School's headmaster, so he can't reveal his feeling to you. But now, he's determined and hopes to take you as his wife. That's why he's gone ahead and became a monk first."

Yilin cried out in alarm again and said, "No... No... That can't be, he can't, he mustn't! You... you tell him not to become a monk."

That granny sighed and said, "It's too late. He's already become a monk. He said, no matter what, he must take you as his wife. If he can't take you as his wife, then he'll castrate himself and become a eunuch."

"Become a eunuch?" Yilin asked. "My master once said that's a vulgar word, and us Buddhists aren't allowed to say it."

"Eunuch isn't a vulgar word," that granny said. "They're those lowly people who attend to the Emperor and Empress."

"Big brother Linghu is a most proud person and he's not willing to be controlled by others. How can he be willing to serve the Emperor and Empress?" Yilin questioned. "He wouldn't even be willing to become an Emperor, so there's no need to say that he'd be willing to attend to an Emperor. So he definitely won't become a eunuch."

"Becoming a eunuch isn't really becoming an attendant to the Emperor and the Empress, it's just an analogy," the granny said. "The person who becomes a eunuch is someone who can't get children."

"I don't believe you," Yilin said. "Big brother Linghu and young lady Ren will get married, then of course they'll give

birth to several little babies. The two of them are so good-looking, their babies will definitely be cute too."

Linghu Chong took a look at Yingying. Both her cheeks were blushing, and she looked extremely happy while being bashful at the same time. That granny became angry and loudly said, "I said he can't get children then he can't get children. Don't say about getting children, he won't even be able to take a wife. He's already sworn an oath, he must take you as his wife."

"I know he only has young lady Ren in his heart," Yilin said.

"His young lady Ren will get married and you'll get married too. Do you get it now?" the granny asked. "He will take two wives. In this world, there are men who have three wives and four concubines, so don't mention of only two wives."

"That can't be," Yilin said. "When a person loves someone, he will only think of this person. Night or day, his mind will be on that person. When eating or sleeping, he'll still be thinking of that person. How can there still be a place for a second person? Just like my father. After my mother left, he went to the edge of the world to look for her. There are a lot of women in this world. If my dad can marry two women, then why didn't he marry another one?"

That granny was silent for a long time before she sighed and said, "He... he did something wrong before, so he felt remorse. Some are like that."

"I'm going," Yilin said. "Granny, if you mention to other people about big brother Linghu... wanting to marry me, I don't want to live anymore."

"Why?" the granny asked. "He said he must take you as his wife. Why aren't you happy about it?"

"No, no! I think about him all the time, and prayed to Buddha all the time wanting Buddha to bless and protect him, and make him happy. I wish for him to not meet with any bad luck or difficulty. I wish for him to get what he wants

and for him to marry young lady Ren. Granny, I wish for him to be happy. I've never once wished for him to marry me," Yilin explained.

"But if he can't marry you, he won't be happy. This will make everyone not to be happy too," the granny argued.

"It's all my fault. If only you didn't hear what I said. I said so many things to you about big brother Linghu," Yilin said. "He's the world's big hero, while I'm only someone who doesn't know anything, a little nun who can't do anything. He said before, 'once I saw a nun, I lose all my bet'. Once he sees me, his luck will be bad, so how can I marry him? I'm a Buddhist, so I must take care to be clear like the water and I mustn't think of these things anymore. Granny, don't mention about this again, I... I also won't see you again."

That granny was worried. "Silly girl, you're odd. Linghu Chong already became a monk for you and he said he must marry you. If Buddha blames anyone, then it'll be him."

Yilin sighed lightly and said, "He has the same thought as my dad? Surely not. My mother was intelligent and beautiful, her temper was reasonable, and she treated people very well. She was the world's nicest woman. So it's a given that my dad became a monk for her. Me... I'm not even half as good as my mother."

Linghu Chong was secretly laughing in his heart and he thought, "Your mother isn't necessarily intelligent or beautiful. But as for her temper being reasonable, there's nothing to say about that. Compared to you, it's your mother who's not half as good as you."

"What do you know?" the granny asked.

"Everytime dad sees me, he always talks about how good mother was," Yilin said. "He said she was soft and gentle, never scolded anyone, and never threw a tantrum. In her whole life, she had never even stepped on an ant before. Even if all the good women in this world are added together, they still wouldn't be better than my mother."

"He... He really said that? I'm afraid... afraid they're false," the granny stammered. When she said these two sentences, her voice was really small. It was obvious her heart was quite agitated.

"Of course they're true," Yingying argued. "I'm his daughter, why would dad trick me?"

All of a sudden, everything was quiet in the Spirit Turtle Pavilion. That granny seemed to have gotten caught up in her thought. Yilin said, "Mute granny, I'm going. I won't see big brother Linghu from today. I'll pray to Guanyin every day to bless and protect him." They could only hear her light footsteps as she went down the pavilion.

After a very long time, that granny seemed to wake up from her dream and she quietly talked to herself, "He said I'm the world's best woman? He went to the edge of the world to look for me? Then, he's not a heartless, perverted and lascivious man?"

Suddenly, at the top of her voice, she screamed out, "Yilin, Yilin, where are you?" But Yilin had gone far. That granny again called out a couple more times. When she did not hear her reply, she quickly went down the pavilion. She hurriedly chased after Yilin, but her footsteps were still very light like that of a cat.



# **Chapter 38: Annihilation**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung**



**Even though Zuo Lengchan was blind, he still had a quick reaction and jumped back rapidly while swearing streams of abuses. Yingying bent down and picked up a long sword.**

Linghu Chong and Yingying were looking at each other and in that moment, all sorts of feelings welled up in their hearts. The razor glinted under the sun shining through the window. Linghu Chong thought, "Never thought this problem could be solved like that."

Suddenly, there were some voices from below the Hanging Temple but they couldn't hear them clearly as the voices moved farther away. After some time, they again heard people coming closer to the temple. Linghu Chong called out, "People!" When he heard his own cry, he realised his mute acupoint was already unsealed. From the acupoints on the body, the mute acupoint was sealed the lightest. As his internal energy was more abundant than Yingying, his mute acupoint was unsealed first. Yingying nodded. Linghu Chong wanted to extend his arms and legs, but he found out he still could not. He heard seven to eight people talking as they came inside the Hanging Temple and came up the Spirit Turtle Pavilion.

Someone with a coarse voice said, "There's not even a ghost in this Hanging Temple, so what are we looking for? We have to be really careful." This person was the mendicant monk Qiu Songnian.

"We have order from the top so we must do this well," Monk Xibao said.

Linghu Chong hastily moved his internal energy to break through the sealed acupoints. However, his internal energies were mainly from other people so even though they were abundant, he couldn't use them like they were his own. The more he forced it, the more difficult it became to unseal his acupoints. He heard Yan Sanxing said, "Mr. Yue said that after we succeeded, he'll give us the Evil Resisting Sword Art. I don't think we can rely on his words. Right now at Mount

Heng-Shan, we've done a great merit already but there are so many people working on this matter, and we have not done something big enough. So why would he give the sword art to us?" While he was talking, a few people came up the stairs. When the door to the chamber was pushed open, they suddenly saw Linghu Chong and Yingying hanging from the beam with their hands and legs tied up. They all gasped in surprise.

"How come young lady Ren is here?" 'Slippery and Hard to Grip' You Xun questioned. "Hey, there's also a monk."

"Who dares to be so rude to young lady Ren?" Madam Zhang asked as she walked next to Yingying and released the ropes Yingying had been tied up with.

"Madam Zhang, wait, wait!" You Xun hastily interrupted.

"Why wait?" Madam Zhang queried.

"There's something strange here," You Xun argued.

"Yi, he's not a monk," Priest Yuling suddenly exclaimed. "He's... he's Headmaster Linghu, Linghu Chong."

They all turned their heads around and looked at Linghu Chong. It took them a while but they finally recognised him. These eight people were usually in awe of Yingying, and they were also afraid of Linghu Chong. They immediately looked at each other in blank dismay, not knowing what to do. Yan Sanxing and Qiu Songnian suddenly exclaimed at the same time, "What a great accomplishment!"

"That's right!" Priest Yuling agreed. "What's so rare about capturing a few nuns? But capturing the headmaster of Heng-Shan -- now that's a big accomplishment. Mr. Yue will definitely give us the Evil Resisting Sword Art now."

"So what should we do?" Madam Zhang asked.

All eight of them thought of the same thing, "If we release young lady Ren, we won't be able to capture Linghu Chong. We'll even lose our lives here. So what should we do?" But regarding Yingying's authority and power, they did not dare to not release her.

You Xun giggled and said, "As the saying goes, if your heart is small you're not a nobleman, to be a gentleman you must be ruthless. It doesn't matter if we're not noblemen, but it's a pity if we're not gentlemen! Very pitiful!"

"You're saying we should take this opportunity to kill her and shut her mouth?" Priest Yuling asked.

"I didn't say it. You said it," You Xun replied.

"Sacred lady has treated us with kindness. Whoever dares to treat her with disrespect, I'll be the first one to go against it," Madam Zhang said severely.

"Even if you release her now, do you think she can understand our situation?" Qiu Songnian argued. "How can she agree to let us capture Linghu Chong?"

"No matter what, we're already in Heng-Shan School," Madam Zhang said. "Betraying our headmaster is also treachery." After she finished speaking, she extended her hand to release the ropes binding Yingying.

"Stop!" Qiu Songnian shouted fiercely.

"Speaking so loudly, are you trying to intimidate me?" Madam Zhang angrily replied.

With a hiss, Qiu Songnian drew his jiedao\* out. Madam Zhang moved quickly and drew out a short sabre from her bosom cutting the ropes binding Yingying's hands and legs. She was thinking Yingying's martial art was very high so once the ropes binding her were cut, there was nothing to be worried of even with those seven people attacking. With a flash, Qiu Songnian slashed his jiedao down. Madam Zhang's short sabre made 'chi, chi' sounds as she thrust three times and forced Qiu Songnian back a couple of steps.

The rest of the people saw Yingying became unbound and they were afraid. They quickly retreated outside the door wanting to be the first to go down from the pavilion. But when Yingying fell to the ground and did not jump up, they knew her acupoints were sealed. One by one, they slowly came back inside. You Xun giggled and said, "You know,

we're all good friends here. Why are we fighting with sabres? Isn't that too dangerous?"

"When young lady Ren's acupoints become unsealed, would we still be able to keep our lives?" Qiu Songnian called out. He gripped his jiedao tightly as he again rushed at Madam Zhang. Jiedao versus short sabre, the fighting was very intense. Qiu Songnian had a big stature and his sabre was big. Moreover, jiedao was very heavy. But against Madam Zhang's close combat style, this mendicant monk actually didn't find the fight easy at all.

You Xun laughingly said, "Stop fighting, stop fighting, let's talk slowly." His hand was holding a folded fan as he approached them to mediate.

"Scram! Don't be in the way!" Qiu Songnian shouted.

"Yes, yes!" You Xun laughingly replied. He turned his body around and his right hand suddenly shot out. Madam Zhang cried out wretchedly. The steel fan in You Xun's hand had already entered her throat. You Xun laughingly said, "We're all friends here. I advised you not to fight but you didn't want to hear me. Isn't that a bit too treacherous?" When he pulled the fan out, blood sprayed out of Madam Zhang's throat.

This was outside everyone's expectation. Startled, Qiu Songnian took a step back and then he scolded, "Damn it! You son of a turtle were actually helping me."

You Xun laughed and said, "If I don't help you, who do I help then?" He turned around and said to Yingying, "Young lady Ren, you're Chief Ren's daughter. All of us gives way to you because of your father. But everyone of us respects and fears you only because you have the antidote for the 'Three Corpse Brain Divine Pill'. But once this antidote is in our hands, Sacred Lady, you'll be useless."

"Right, right," The six people all agreed. "Once we have taken her antidote, we can kill her to shut her up."

"Let's take an oath first," Priest Yuling said. "Whoever leaks this matter out, the 'Three Corpse Brain Divine Pill' in

him will come out instantly." These people were thinking they must kill Yingying, but thinking of Ren Woxing, they were terrified. If this matter were to leak out, even though Jianghu was large, they still might not be able to find a shelter to hide in. The seven of them immediately said this oath.

Linghu Chong knew that once these people had finished saying their oaths, they would use their sabres to kill Yingying. So he hurriedly moved his inner energy to those acupoints which were still sealed, but he was still unable to unseal any of them. His heart was worried and he looked at Yingying. He saw she was also looking at him and there was no fear in her eyes at all. He was immediately relieved and thought, "In the end, we all must die. It would be very good for us to die together."

Qiu Songnian said to You Xun, "Do it."

"Monk Qiu has always done things very quickly and you have the most heroic spirit. I'd like to ask Brother Qiu to do it," You Xun replied.

"If you don't do it, I'll butcher you first," Qiu Songnian scolded.

"Since Brother Qiu doesn't dare, then how about if Brother Yan do it?" You Xun laughingly said.

"Your granny, why don't I dare? I just don't feel like killing people today," Qiu Songnian angrily replied.

"It doesn't matter who does it. No one will ever reveal it," Priest Yuling interrupted.

"Since it doesn't matter, then Brother Priest, please do it," Monk Xibao said.

"Why is everyone refusing?" Yan Sanxing said. "Let's speak frankly here. No one here trusts anyone else. So let us all get our weapons out and kill young lady Ren at the same time." Even though these people were ferocious and evil, when the moment arrived to kill Yingying, they did not dare to insult her even slightly.

"Wait, let me get the medicine first before we do anything else," You Xun said.

"Why do you have to be the one to take it?" Qiu Songnian asked. "Once it's in your hands, you will coerce other people. Let me take it."

"If it's in your hands, who's to say that you won't coerce other people?" You Xun replied.

"Stop wasting time!" Priest Yuling bellowed. "If we waste time till her acupoints are unsealed then it'll be trouble. Let's kill her first, then we'll distribute the medicine!" With a hiss, he drew his long sword out. The others also took out their weapons and encircled Yingying. Yingying's eyes were wide open as she unwaveringly stared at Linghu Chong. She was thinking of the events in these last few days when they were sharing some sweet moments together. The corners of her mouth were tenderly smiling.

Yan Sanxing called out, "I'm going to call one, two, three. We'll move at the same time. One, two, three!" When the word 'three' came out of his mouth, seven weapons chopped down on Yingying's body.

Who would have thought all seven weapons would stop by half a foot before they reach her body, as if they had a prior agreement to do this.

"Cowards, why didn't you kill her?" Qiu Songnian scolded. "You were thinking the person beside you would do it so the blame wouldn't fall on you!"

"You're more of a coward," Monk Xibao retorted. "You didn't even chop down with your jiedao!"

Each of them, in their own mind, wanted the person beside them to kill Yingying first so that their own weapons wouldn't need to be stained with blood. To kill someone they had always respected was actually not easy.

"Let's do it again!" Qiu Songnian urged. "This time, whoever stops their weapons will be a bastard son of a turtle, birthed by a prostitute, worse than a dog! I'm going to call out one, two, three. One ----- Two -----" The word 'three' had not left his mouth yet when Linghu Chong called out, "Evil Resisting Sword Art!"



The seven of them heard him and they immediately turned their heads around. Around four of them asked at the same time, "What?"

Yue Buqun had used the Evil Resisting Sword Art to blind Zuo Lengchan on top of the place of worship and this had spread throughout Wulin. These seven people were very jealous. These last few days, they had been thinking of this Evil Resisting sword manual day and night.

Linghu Chong recited, "Evil Resisting Sword Art, supreme swordsmanship, attain sword qi first, then learn the divine sword. Divine qi is the foundation, the essence of the sword art. How to develop the sword qi, how to borne the divine sword? Both secrets are contained in this." When the first sentence was uttered, the seven people moved towards him for half a step. After the sixth or seventh sentence, all seven of them had left the side of Yingying and had gone beside Linghu Chong. When Linghu Chong stopped reciting, Qiu Songnian asked, "This... This is Evil Resisting sword manual?"

"If it's not Evil Resisting sword manual, then is it Resisting Evil sword manual?" Linghu Chong answered.

"Continue reciting it," Qiu Songnian persuaded.

Linghu Chong recited, "When practising the qi, mind must be sincere, clear your thoughts. Heart must be pure..." When he reached this point, he stopped reciting.

Monk Xibao urged, "Continue, continue." But Priest Yuling's mouth was muttering, trying to memorise those passages, "When practising the qi, mind must be sincere, clear your thoughts. Heart must be pure."

Actually, Linghu Chong had not seen the Evil Resisting sword manual yet. The lines he was reciting were actually Huashan sword art's formula, and he just changed the sentence 'Huashan's sword art, light and quick' to 'Evil Resisting Sword Art, supreme swordsmanship'. This was the root of Yue Buqun's 'Qi Branch' formula, where the sentence 'learn sword qi first, then learn the divine sword' existed. Linghu Chong didn't study much so his vocabulary was quite

limited. In such a short time, how could he fluently invent those sentences just like a scholar?

But Qiu Songnian and the others had never heard Huashan sword art's formula before. Second, they had been thinking of the Evil Resisting Sword Art and they were very fascinated by it. So once they heard someone reciting the formula of the Evil Resisting Sword Art, each one of them became muddle headed. How could they still have time to think whether the sword manual was real or false?

Linghu Chong continued with his recitation "Flow smoothly, fill the sword qi, Evil Resisting Sword comes out, everything will be killed..." This sentence 'everything will be killed' was made up by him because Huashan sword formula definitely did not have this kind of formula. After reciting till here, he said, "The, the... next sentence is something like 'if unable to kill, sword art is ineffective', but maybe not, I don't remember it that clearly."

Monk Xibao and the others asked, "Where's the sword manual?"

Linghu Chong replied, "This sword manual... is certainly not on me." At the same time he was saying this, he was also looking at his stomach. This sentence was really along the lines of 'there's no 300 taels here'<sup>8</sup>. Right after he said this, two hands promptly reached inside his clothes. One hand belonged to Monk Xibao, and the other to Qiu Songnian. All of a sudden, the two of them cried out miserably. Monk Xibao's head had split open, while there was a sword piercing from the back of Qiu Songnian's body all the way through to his chest. They had fallen victim to Yan Sanxing and Priest Yuling.

"We've worked so hard to get our hands on this Evil Resisting Sword Manual," Yan Sanxing laughingly said. "Once this sword manual appeared, these two bastards wanted it for themselves. How can things be that easy in this world?" He then kicked away the two people's corpses.

In the beginning, Linghu Chong pretended to recite the Evil Resisting Sword Manual because he saw Yingying's life was in grave danger. So he thought up of an idea quickly wanting to lead these people away from her and delay them, thinking that Yingying's and his acupoints might get unsealed soon. He never thought things would come to this point. Not only had he led these people away from her, they had even killed each other. Now, there were only five of them from the previous seven. Secretly, he felt really happy.

"No one has seen whether this sword manual is really on Linghu Chong's body," You Xun said. "But we've already killed each other first, that's really impatient..." He had not finished speaking but Yan Sanxing was already rolling his eyes and staring at him hatefully.

"You're saying we're impatient. You don't accept this, do you?" Yan Sanxing said. "I'm afraid you want to get this sword manual for yourself."

"I don't dare to get it for myself and end up like that big monk with my head split open," You Xun replied. "Where's the fun in that? But this sword manual is very famous in the world. We all wanted to widen our scope and have always thought about it."

The Tung Cypress Whiz Duo said at the same time, "That's right. No one is allowed to get it for himself. If you want to look then look at it together."

Yan Sanxing said to You Xun, "Ok, then you get the sword manual out from this kid's chest."

You Xun shook his head and smiled. "I don't have this idea of taking it for myself. I also don't dare to see it first. Brother Yan, once you take it out, I'll be satisfied if you just give me a peep at it."

Yan Sanxing then said to Priest Yuling, "Then you go and take it out!"

"It's still best if Brother Yan takes it out," Priest Yuling replied.

Yan Sanxing looked at the Tung Cypress Whiz Duo, but the two of them were also shaking their heads. Yan Sanxing angrily said, "Do you think I don't understand what the four of you bastards are thinking? You want me to take that sword manual and then you're going to kill me. But this won't work on me." The five people were looking at each other. The situation was now deadlocked.

Linghu Chong was afraid they might again go and harm Yingying, so he said, "Don't get too worried, let me try to remember more. Hmm, Evil Resisting Sword comes out, everything will be killed, if unable to kill, sword art is ineffective... Not right, not right, sword art is ineffective, how can that be? Terrible, terrible, this sword manual is too profound. I just can't remember it."

Those five people had been intently trying to get the sword manual. When they heard such vulgar and crude words from this sword manual, their heart itched even more to get it.

Yan Sanxing slashed his sabre and shouted, "It's not difficult if you want me to take the sword manual from this kid's chest. Four of you step back outside the door, so I don't have to worry about you sons of turtle attacking me from behind when I'm taking it."

The Tung Cypress Whiz Duo just backed out of the door without saying anything. You Xun giggled but he also retreated outside. Priest Yuling hesitated before stepping back for a few steps. Yan Sanxing shouted, "Step outside of the door with both your legs!"

"What are you shouting for?" Priest Yuling replied. "If I want to go out then I'll go out, if not, then what do you care?" Even though he said this, he still went outside the door at the end. The four people watched Yan Sanxing, and were thinking on his possible escape routes from this Spirit Turtle Pavilion. The stair was definitely the only escape route Yan Sanxing could take since it wouldn't be possible for him to fly out from there.

Yan Sanxing turned around and his back was now facing Linghu Chong. He was gazing at the four people outside the door, afraid that they might suddenly sneak an attack on him. He reached back with his left hand to grope inside Linghu Chong's bosom, but he could not feel any book in there. He held his sabre in his mouth by biting on it and he used his left hand to grab Linghu Chong's chest while his right hand reached back to grope around. As he used strength on his left hand, he promptly felt his inner energy leaking out. He was startled and hastily tried to pull his hand back. But how could he have known that his hand would be stuck like it was glued to Linghu Chong's skin and he couldn't pull it back. He was even more startled now and hastily moved his internal energy to snatch his hand back. However, the more internal energy he used, the faster it leaked out. He struggled mightily as his inner energy was rushing out like the river torrent rushing down a dike.

Linghu Chong was in a desperate situation and suddenly there was an enemy's internal energy being injected into him. He felt really happy and he said, "Why are you stopping my heart meridian? How about if you let me recite the sword formula for you to listen to?" He randomly moved his lips like he was saying something.

When Priest Yuling and the others saw it from outside the door, they really thought he was reciting the sword manual. They didn't want to be disadvantaged since they couldn't hear it so they immediately rushed inside to be in front of Linghu Chong.

"That's it. That's the sword manual," Linghu Chong exclaimed. "Why don't you take it out and give everyone a look!" But Yan Sanxing's left hand was still glued to Linghu Chong's body so how could he take it out?

Priest Yuling thought Yan Sanxing had grabbed the sword manual but because he wanted to keep it for himself, he didn't want to take it out. He immediately extended his hand to Linghu Chong's bosom to grab it too. When his hand

bumped Linghu Chong's skin, his inner energy leaked out and his hand was also glued to him.

"Hey, hey, don't fight you two! You might tear the sword manual; then no one can see it!" Linghu Chong called out.

The Tung Cypress Whiz Duo exchanged a glance. With a flash, two gold staffs smashed down. Yan Sanxing's and Priest Yuling's heads burst open and they died instantly. As soon as they died, their inner energy disappeared causing both their hands to be released from Linghu Chong's body and their corpses fell down on the floor. Linghu Chong had suddenly received two people's inner energies. These inner energies had come from outside the sealed acupoints and not from inside the sealed acupoints. With these inner energies rushing in, the sealed acupoints were unsealed quickly. His original inner energy was already abundant, with a little bit of power, the ropes binding his hands were broken straight away. Extending his hand inside his bosom to grab the handle of his short sword, he said, "The sword manual is here. Who wants it?"

The Tung Cypress Whiz Duo were slow witted and they didn't think the ropes breaking apart was something unusual. When they heard him wanting to hand over the sword manual, they were exulted and together they extended their hands forward.

'Pai, pai'

Both their right wrists were cut and their hands fell on the floor. They cried out wretchedly while jumping back at the same time. Linghu Chong broke apart the ropes binding his legs and flew down to position himself in front of Yingying. He then said to You Xun, "Sword art comes out, everything will be killed! Brother You, do you want to look at the sword manual?"

The sly You Xun was the only one left unharmed. At this time, he was already very frightened that his face was ashen. He tremblingly said, "Thank you, I... I don't want to take a look."

"No need to be so polite. Have a look for a while, there's no harm to look at it," replied a smiling Linghu Chong. He extended his left hand to poke Yingying's back and waist to unseal her acupoints. You Xun's whole body was trembling incessantly as he said, "Master Linghu... Master... Linghu... Hero... Hero, you you... you..." Both his knees bent and he knelt on the ground. "Your lowly servant has offended you and deserves death. It's... it's useless to say anything more. Sacred Lady and Headmaster still have your lives, your lowly servant will go through fire, go through water..."

"To learn the Evil Resisting Sword Art, the first step is really fun. Why don't you do it!" Linghu Chong laughingly said.

You Xun kept on kowtowing, hitting his head on the floor as he said, "Sacred Lady and Headmaster are very broadminded. Everyone in Wulin knows this. Today, let your lowly servant atone for my sin. Your lowly servant will go to Jianghu and declare you two saints... no, no, no..." When he said 'saints', he remembered something and realised he had stumbled into another disaster in his fright. Yingying can get most angered when someone mentioned behind her back that Linghu Chong and she were related. So he wanted to hold back his tongue but it was too late.

Yingying saw the Tung Cypress Whiz Duo were standing side by side. Even though they had each lost a hand and blood was pouring out of their arms without pause, their faces still showed no fear. She asked, "Are you two husband and wife?" The man from Tung Cypress Whiz Duo was called Zhou Gutong, and the woman was called Wu Baiying.

"Today, we've fallen under your hands. Whether you want to kill or peel our flesh off, the two of us won't bat an eyelid. Why do you ask so much?" Zhou Gutong replied.

Yingying liked his haughtiness and coldly said, "I'm asking if the two of you are husband and wife."

"We're not husband and wife officially. But for the last twenty years, we're much better compared to other officially

married husband and wife," Wu Baiying said.

"Between the two of you, only one is allowed to live. Both of you are lacking a hand, a leg, also lacking a ..." Yingying thought her own father was the same as these two people. They all lacked an eye, so she didn't say it out loud. After a pause, she continued, "Two of you can fight and kill each other. The one who survive can go!"

"Very good!" the Tung Cypress Whiz Duo replied at the same time. A gold flash was seen as the two of them wielded their gold staffs to hit their own foreheads.

"Wait!" Yingying shouted. With a long sword in her right hand and a short sword in her left hand, she rushed forward and deflected the two staffs upward. As she hit the two staffs, she felt her shoulders and arms went numb and both her swords were dangerously close to being disarmed. However, her left arm was weaker so Wu Baiying's staff still continued and hit her forehead. In an instant, blood was flowing down.

Zhou Gutong loudly shouted, "Once I kill myself, Sacred Lady's words are like the mountains, and she'll let you go. What's not good about that?"

"Of course I'll die and you'll live. What's there to fight about?" Wu Baiying replied.

Yingying nodded and said, "Very good, the two of you husband and wife are very loving. I really respect you for that. I won't kill either of you. Quickly wrap up your cut hand." The Cypress Whiz Duo were extremely happy. They tossed their staffs away, and rushed towards each other to wrap up their wounds.

"But there's one matter the two of you must do," Yingying said. Wu Baiying and Zhou Gutong acknowledged the order together. Yingying continued, "After you've gone down the mountain, you must pay respect to the heaven and get married. Two of you travelling together, not becoming husband and wife, how... how..." She originally wanted to say 'how can you do that', but she immediately remembered about Linghu Chong and her being together also without



being husband and wife. She couldn't help her face blushing red.

Wu Baiying and Zhou Gutong gave a glance and kowtowed their thanks together. You Xun said, "Sacred Lady is very kind and forgiving, not only did she spare your life, she even look after your lifelong matter. The two of you are really lucky. I've known for a long time that Sacred Lady treats her subordinates really well."

"Under whose order did you come to Heng-Shan this time?" Yingying asked. "What are you scheming about?"

"Your lowly servant was deceived by that dog Yue Buqun. He said he received Chief Ren's Black Command Wood and he wanted the nuns of Heng-Shan captured and brought to the Dark Wood Cliff. He said the order comes from Chief Ren," You Xun answered.

"Yue Buqun has the Black Command Wood in his hand?" Yingying asked.

"Yes, yes! Subordinate carefully looked at it. He really has the Sun Moon Sect's Black Command Wood. If not, why would I listen to that dog Yue Buqun's order when Subordinate has always been loyal to Chief and Sacred Lady?"

Yingying pondered, "How did Yue Buqun get my sect's Black Command Wood? Ah, that's it, he took the Three Corpse Brain Pill, so he was listening to dad's order and dad gave him the command wood." She then asked, "Yue Buqun also said: once you finished with the order, he'll give you the Evil Resisting Sword Art, didn't he?"

You Xun kowtowed continuously as he said, "That dog Yue Buqun can really deceive people. Everyone believes him."

"You were saying you've done a great merit in Heng-Shan this time around, what's that all about?" Yingying queried.

"There are some people who had gone to the mountaintop and put the confusion poison into the water spring, so all Heng-Shan's disciples got knocked out. There

are also some people who didn't know anything inside the Other Courtyard who got knocked out by the confusion poison. At this time, they're already being sent to the Dark Wood Cliff," You Xun related.

"Did you kill anyone?" Linghu Chong worriedly asked.

"Killed around eight to nine people, they're all from the Other Courtyard. They didn't get knocked out by the confusion poison and resisted, so they were killed," You Xun replied.

"Who are they?"

"Your lowly servant doesn't know their names. Hero Linghu... your friends aren't one of them."

Linghu Chong nodded his head feeling relieved. Yingying said, "Let's go down."

"Alright," Linghu Chong acknowledged. He took the long sword that Monk Xibao left behind and laughingly said, "If I see that evil granny, I'm going to dispute this well with her."

"Thank you Sacred Lady and Headmaster Linghu for not killing me," You Xun said.

"Why are you being so polite for?" Yingying replied. She waved her left hand and her short sword shot out. With a 'pu' sound, it was embedded in You Xun's chest. This sly traitor 'Slippery and Hard to Grip' You Xun died instantly.

They went down the pavilion together. The mountain was lonesome and only chirpings of birds were heard. Yingying looked at Linghu Chong and couldn't help bursting into laughter. Linghu Chong let out a drawn out sigh and said, "Linghu Chong shaved his head to be a monk, from this time on, my body has entered Buddhism. Shizu, let's part ways."

Yingying knew he was joking, but her heart was still worried and she involuntarily shuddered. She grabbed his arm and said, "Brother Chong, don't... don't say this kind of joke with me, I... I..." Just then when she threw her sword killing You Xun, she didn't even blink, but her voice sounded scared at this time. Linghu Chong's heart was moved, his left hand patted his bald head and he sighed, "But with such a

pretty as a jade girl in this world, big monk here will just have to return to the secular world."

Yingying laughed captivately then said, "After I killed You Xun, I thought there wouldn't be anyone with an oily and slippery mouth in Wulin anymore, then we'll have some quiet and peace, didn't expect... hehe!"

"Try touching my shiny head, it's so slippery that your hand won't stay on it," Linghu Chong smilingly said.

Yingying blushed and spit. "We're talking about proper stuff here. Heng-Shan's disciples have been captured and taken to Dark Wood Cliff and we're going to save them. This is a big big problem. Moreover, it'll also harm our father and daughter relationship..."

"Also, it'll harm my father and son in law relationship," Linghu Chong added. Yingying glared at him, but she was enjoying the sweet feeling blooming in her heart. Linghu Chong continued, "We mustn't tarry, let's go catch up to them quickly. Cut them off and save them."

"When we catch up to them, kill them all and don't leave anyone alive. It's best if we don't let my dad know." She walked for a few steps before letting out a long sigh. Linghu Chong understood her heart. She wanted to conceal this big matter from Ren Woxing's ears and eyes, which was something easier said than done. But he himself was the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, so when Heng-Shan's people were taken prisoner, how could he not rescue them? She had decided to follow her own decision and she didn't care anymore even though it would violate her father's order. When he thought till here, he decided that it was time to make a decision. He extended his left hand to grab a hold of her right hand. Yingying struggled slightly, but seeing there was no one around, she let him held her hand.

"Yingying, I understand your heart. This matter implicates the harmony between your father and daughter. I'm really very sorry," Linghu Chong said.

Yingying shook her head slightly and replied, "If daddy took my feeling into consideration, he wouldn't have taken any action against Heng-Shan School. But, I'm guessing he doesn't have any malice towards you either."

Linghu Chong immediately comprehended the situation. "That's right. Your father must have captured the Heng-Shan's disciples to force me to swear an oath to the Sun Moon Divine Sect."

"That's right. Daddy actually likes you a lot. Moreover, you're the only person who has inherited his divine martial art."

"I'm not willing to swear an oath to join the Divine Sect. What 'Long live to chief, unify the Jianghu', what 'Refined scholar, kind-hearted warrior, to the benefit of common people'! I want to vomit just hearing those disgusting talks."

"I know. That's why I've never persuaded you. If you enter the Divine Sect, you'll become Chief in the future. From day till night hearing those disgusting talks, then... then we wouldn't be like we are now. Ai, daddy is again on top of the Dark Wood Cliff, his temper has also changed really quickly."

"But we mustn't offend your father." He extended his right hand to grip her left hand. "Yingying, after we save Heng-Shan's people, you and I should go pay respect to heaven and earth to get married, we shouldn't worry about orders from parents or some words from some matchmakers. You and I should retreat from Wulin, seal our swords and retreat into seclusion. Then we can ignore outside matters and borne some children."

When Yingying first heard of him talking properly, her face turned red and her heart liked it a lot. But hearing the last sentence, she was startled and used some power to pull her hands away from his. Linghu Chong laughingly said, "After we've become husband and wife, we don't want to get some children?"

"You're talking nonsense again!" Yingying angrily replied. "I won't talk to you for three days!"

Linghu Chong knew she would do what she said. He stuck his tongue out and said, "Ok, I'll say less jokes. Catching up is most important now. Let's go up Xianxing Peak to have a look."

The two of them used their qinggong to up the path towards Xianxing Peak. There wasn't a single soul in Wuse Convent or in the resident houses. Things and clothes were in disarray with sabres and swords scattered around the floor. Fortunately, there wasn't a trace of blood on the floor, seemed like no one was injured. They also went to the Other Courtyard to take a look, no one was there too. With the various wines and dishes displayed on the table, Linghu Chong's wine addiction was aroused. But how would he dare to drink these wines, he said, "I'm very hungry, let's go down the mountain quickly and grab something to eat and drink."

Yingying tore the outer garment of Linghu Chong's gown and wrapped it on his head. Linghu Chong laughed and said, "This is presentable. Else a big monk kidnapping a young girl from a respectable family, going places, it will be scandalous."

When they reached the foot of the mountain, it was already at the hour of Wei (1-3pm), so it was easy to find a little restaurant and they ate their fill. They recognised the road going to Dark Wood Cliff and took a deep breath before rushing to catch up. After rushing for a few hours, they suddenly heard a faint murmuring of shouting and curses coming from behind the mountain. They stopped and it seemed those voices belonged to the Peach Valley Six Fairies. They quickly rushed towards where the sound came from and they gradually could hear much clearer. Sure enough, they were the Peach Valley Six Fairies. Yingying quietly said, "I wonder who these six babies fighting with?"

The two of them went around the mountain and hid behind a tree. They saw the Peach Valley Six Fairies were shouting while they fought intensely and surrounded that person. That person hastily went here and there, the body

moved extremely fast, and only a grey streak was seen going round in between those six brothers. That person was unexpectedly to be Yilin's mother, the one who was pretending to be the mute granny inside the Hanging Temple. Following a couple of slapping sound, Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy cried out as their cheeks were slap.

Linghu Chong was happy and quietly said, "Sixth month's debt returns quickly. I'm going to shave her head too." His hand pressed on the sword's handle, waiting for the Peach Valley Six Fairies to defeat her before jumping out and taking his revenge. But then he heard a continuous 'pai, pai' sound, the six brothers were slapped on the cheeks many times by her. Peach Valley Six Fairies were furious. They wanted to just grab her arms and legs and tear her into four pieces. But that granny moved really fast, like a ghost like a demon. A few times she looked certain to be captured but they were always short by a few inches and she managed to escape which was followed by a few whacks to their cheeks. But this granny also saw these six people were formidable so she was afraid her strength might get depleted and after defeating one or two of them, the remaining ones would capture her. After another series of fighting, that granny knew it was difficult to win. She launched both palms and struck four people four times. Suddenly, she leaped back and turned around to run quickly. She ran fast as lightning, in just a moment, she was already dozens of feet away. The Peach Valley Six Fairies shouted together and went to chase after her.

Linghu Chong took his sword out and shouted, "Where are you running to?" The sword flashed and it was pointed at her throat. This attack was attacking to kill. That granny was startled and hastily withdrew her head to get away. Linghu Chong slantingly pierced his sword towards her right shoulder. There was no way for that granny to dodge it so she was forced to retreat for a couple of steps. Linghu Chong

forced her to step back for one more step. With his long sword in hand, how could that granny be his match? With three thrusts, she had been forced to step back for five steps. If he wanted to take her life, that granny would have died a long time ago.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies cheered loudly as the point of Linghu Chong's long sword reached her chest. Peachtree Root Fairy and three of his brothers rushed forward, grabbed her limbs, and lifted her up.

"Don't harm her!" Linghu Chong quickly shouted. Peachtree Flower Fairy lifted his hand and gave her a slap.

"Hang her up there first," Linghu Chong commanded.

"Yes, get the rope, get the rope," Peachtree Root Fairy said. But these six people didn't have any rope with them and there was no where to find ropes in this wilderness as well. Despite this, Peachtree Flower Fairy and Peachtree Trunk Fairy still searched for ropes. Suddenly, their hold loosened and that granny escaped from their clutches. She rolled on the ground and was just about to fly out of there when she felt some tingling on her back.

"Please stay!" said a smiling Linghu Chong with the point of his long sword poking her on the back.

That granny was surprised and her face changed colour, all she could do now was stand there unable to move. Peach Valley Six Fairies ran up to her and with six simultaneous pokes sealed that granny's arms and legs acupoints. Peachtree Trunk Fairy rubbed his swollen cheek then extended his hand wishing to slap her cheek. Linghu Chong regarded Yilin so he wasn't willing to let her be embarrassed. "Wait, let's hang her up first before we do anything," Linghu Chong told them.

When the Peach Valley Six Fairies heard him, they wanted to hang her high up there so they were jubilant. They quickly gathered up some tree barks and rolled them to make ropes. Linghu Chong asked the six of them why they were fighting with her.

Peachtree Branch Fairy answered, "Six of us brothers were just here taking a dump, minding our own business. When suddenly, this granny went crazy and she asked: 'Hey, did you see a small nun?' Her tone was very rude and she also interrupted us taking a dump..." Yingying heard him talking something dirty, so she scowled and walked away.

"That's right, this granny is the most unreasonable person in the whole world," Linghu Chong smilingly said.

"Of course we ignored her and told her to go away. That granny just started hitting people so we fought back. Originally, we were of course fighting to win, but since we haven't finished taking a dump yet so it wasn't comfortable fighting with her. Brother Linghu, if it weren't for your timely arrival, she would've escaped," Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

"That's not necessarily true, we were letting her escape for a few steps first, then we'd have chased her down. To teach her what empty happiness is like," Peachtree Flower Fairy argued.

"Under the hands of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, we would definitely have recaptured a nobody who runs away from us," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

"This is the method cats use to catch mice. It will let them run for a few steps first then recapture them again," Peachtree Root Fairy added.

"Even one cat would be able to catch six mice, moreover six cats would definitely be able to catch one mouse. That's very easy," Linghu Chong laughingly said.

When Peach Valley Six Fairies heard Linghu Chong agreeing to what they were saying, they were all exulted. As they were talking, they finished rolling those tree barks into ropes. They tied that granny's hands and ankles behind her back and tied her high up on a tree.

Linghu Chong wielded his long sword to slash at the tree and cutting away pieces of barks from it. With the brushing of the sword, there were now five big letters on the tree trunk: 'World's Number One Vinegar Pot.'



"Brother Linghu, why is this granny the world's number one vinegar pot? Is she really that good in drinking vinegar?" Peachtree Root Fairy asked. "I don't believe it. Let's get her down and let me compete with her!"

"Vinegar pot is the word for cursing her," said a laughing Linghu Chong. "The Peach Valley Six Fairies are matchless heroes, your righteousness reaching the clouds in the sky, skilled in culture and martial art, favoured by the common people, so how can this evil granny be even close to you? So there's no need to compete."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies opened their mouths wide laughing, they all said, "Right, right, right!"

"So did you actually see little martial sister Yilin?" Linghu Chong asked.

"You're asking about that beautiful little nun from Heng-Shan School? We didn't see any little nun, but we saw two big monks," Peachtree Branch Fairy answered.

"One was the little nun's father, the other was the little nun's disciple," Peachtree Trunk Fairy added.

"Where?" Linghu Chong inquired.

"These people passed about two hours ago. We had an appointment to drink wine with them at the town just ahead. We said we'd catch up with them after taking a dump. But who could've guessed this evil granny would come and bother us?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

Linghu Chong thought for a while before saying, "Ok, I'm going to the town first, you can follow when you're ready. The six of you are big heroes and would never hit someone being tied up. If you slap this evil granny's cheek, it would damage your heroes' reputation." The Peach Valley Six Fairies agreed to this. Linghu Chong immediately left quickly with Yingying. Yingying laughingly said, "You didn't shave her head, it must be because you're regarding little martial sister Yilin so you only took a little bit of revenge on her."

After going for more than ten li, they arrived at a big town. They searched till the second wine house before they

saw Monk No Commandment and Tian Boguang sitting at a table. When they saw Linghu Chong and Yingying, they gasped in surprise and jumped up happily. No Commandment quickly ordered more wine and dishes. Linghu Chong asked whether there was something unusual happening. Tian Boguang answered, "I was made to look silly at Heng-Shan and I didn't have anymore face to stay there, so I asked grand martial master to quickly leave. We can't go back to that Tong Yuan Valley again."

Linghu Chong thought they still didn't know about the matter of the Heng-Shan School's disciples being taken captives, so he asked Monk No Commandment, "Great Master, can I ask you to do something for me?"

"You can, why not?" No Commandment replied.

"But this matter is a secret and your grand disciple can't get involved in this," Linghu Chong said.

"Isn't that easy? I'll just tell him to go far away and not hinder me in doing this matter," No Commandment said.

"Go towards the south east for about ten li. On top of a tall tree there, there's a person being tied high up there..." Linghu Chong described.

"Ah," No Commandment uttered with an odd expression on his face and his body slightly shuddered.

"That person is my friend. I'd like to ask you to help that person down," Linghu Chong explained.

"Isn't it easy to do? Why aren't you doing it yourself?" No Commandment asked.

"I'm not hiding anything, this person is a female," Linghu Chong said. He then gestured with his mouth towards Yingying and said, "Young lady Ren and I are together so it's not appropriate."

No Commandment laughed aloud and said, "I understand. You're afraid young lady Ren will get jealous." Yingying glared at the two of them.

Linghu Chong chuckled and said, "That lady's jealousy is even bigger. Back then, her husband saw a madam and

praised her to be beautiful, so this lady just left without saying a word. This caused her husband to look for her till the end of the world for more than ten years."

As No Commandment heard him, his eyes were getting bigger and bigger. He said, "This... this... this..." His gasping was also getting noisier.

"I heard her husband didn't manage to find her when he was searching for her," Linghu Chong added. When he said till here, the Peach Valley Six Fairies walked up the stairs giggling. No Commandment looked like he didn't see them, both of his hands grabbed Linghu Chong's arms and stammered, "Re... really?"

"She told me, if her husband find her and kneel in front of her, she wouldn't change her mind at all. That's why once you release her, she will run straight away. This lady's movement is really fast, you just have to blink and she'll be gone," Linghu Chong said.

"I won't blink at all, I won't blink at all," No Commandment said.

"I also asked her, why is it that she doesn't want to meet with her husband," Linghu Chong said. "She said her husband is the world's number one heartless, perverted and lascivious man, so she didn't want to meet him and that he's also in the wrong."

No Commandment cried out and turned around wishing to go. Linghu Chong grabbed a hold of his arm and whispered in his ear, "I'll teach you a secret, she won't run away again." No Commandment was startled but he was also happy. After being dumbfounded for a little while, he suddenly knelt down and, 'boom, boom, boom' he kowtowed three times. With a loud voice, he said, "Brother Linghu, no, Headmaster Linghu, ancestor Linghu, Master Linghu, quickly tell me the secret, I'll take you as my teacher."

Linghu Chong couldn't help laughing as he said, "I don't dare, I don't dare, please get up." Pulling him to get up and then whispered in his ear, "Help her down from the tree but

don't release the ropes or unseal her acupoints, then carry her to an inn and get a room. Think about it, she's a woman and a Buddhist, how do you prevent her from running away from the inn?"

No Commandment scratched his head then he hesitated and answered, "I... I don't really get it."

"You take off her clothes first then unseal her acupoint. Since she's now naked, would she dare to run away from the inn?" Linghu Chong whispered.

No Commandment was very happy and he called out, "Good plan, good plan! Master Linghu, your benevolence..." He didn't finish his sentence before he shouted happily and went out through the window. Once he hit the ground, he immediately flew out.

"Yi, this monk is really weird, why did he go?" Peachtree Root Fairy was perplexed.

"He must've wanted to pee and can't wait anymore," Peachtree Branch Fairy answered.

"Then why did he kowtow to brother Linghu and started calling him Master? Could it be that he wants someone to teach him how to pee even though he's so old already?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy asked.

Yingying knew these six people most likely would speak some vulgar words as they went on, so she cast a glance at Linghu Chong and went down the stairs.

"Brothers, I've long heard the six of you have wine capacities like the ocean and you're matchless in this world, so drink slowly. My capacity is shallow so I'm going to take my leave first," Linghu Chong said.

When the Peach Valley Six Fairies heard him praising their wine capacities, they were all happy and all thought that if they didn't drink a few jars they might lose a bit of reputation, so they called out, "Bring out six jars of wine!" "Your wine capacity is of course much lower than ours." "You go first, if you wait for us to drink our fill, I'm afraid you'll have to wait till tomorrow."

Linghu Chong only had to say one sentence and he had managed to get away from these six people and went down the stairs. Yingying pursed her lips smiling and she said, "You reconciled a husband and wife, what a boundless benevolence. But this method you taught him, it's rather... rather..." When she said till here, her face became red and she turned away her head. Looking at her, Linghu Chong giggled but didn't say a word.

The two of them walked outside of the town. After walking for a stretch of the road, Linghu Chong was still smiling and was continuously looking at her. Yingying got angry and shouted, "What are you looking at? Never seen me before?"

"I was just thinking, this evil granny hanged both of us on the ceiling's beam, so we repaid her back by hanging her on a tree. She shaved my head, so I taught her husband how to take off her gown, this is also repaying her back," said a smiling Linghu Chong.

Yingying smiled and said, "This is also called repaying back?"

Linghu Chong laughed before replying, "I'm only hoping Great Master No Commandment isn't rash and that this husband and wife get together again."

Yingying giggled and said, "You should be careful, you're going to be in trouble when that evil granny see you next time."

"I helped her to reunite with her husband, so it won't be too late for her to thank me then," Linghu Chong smiled. After he said this, he again took glances at Yingying and laughed to himself with his expression looking odd.

"What are you laughing at now?" Yingying asked.

"I was just thinking Great Master No Commandment being reunited with his wife, I wonder what they'll be saying to each other," Linghu Chong replied.

"Then why do you keep looking at me for?" Yingying queried. Suddenly, she understood what Linghu Chong

meant. This loafer was thinking of Great Master No Commandment in the inn taking off his wife's gown. His mind was thinking of this but his eyes kept looking at her, it could be imagined how hard he was holding himself in. All of a sudden, her cheeks were bright red and she wielded her hand to hit him.

Linghu Chong dodged it and laughed. "A woman hitting her husband is an evil wife!"

At this time, they suddenly heard light hissing sound from somewhere far. Yingying recognised this was her sect's whistling to summon people. She raised her left hand and put her fingers to her lip, her right hand made a movement and she whistled towards that direction.

They then went forward for dozens of feet before seeing a woman running from the west towards the east. The ground was spacious and vast and there was no where for them to hide. That person saw Yingying and was startled, then she quickly went up to them to pay her respect. "Divine Sect's Heaven Wind Hall's Fragrant Master Sang San Niang, paying my respect to Sacred Lady. Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Yingying nodded her head a few times. After that an old man came out from the east and walked quickly towards Yingying. He bowed before Yingying to pay his respect. "Qin Weibang also pays my respect to Sacred Lady. Chief revives the sacred sect and benefits the common people."

"Elder Qin, you're also here," Yingying said.

"Yes!" Qin Weibang acknowledged. "Your lowly servant received Chief's order to find information in this area. Fragrant Master Sang, what news have you found out?"

"Reporting to Sacred Lady and Elder Qin, early morning today, subordinate was at Linfengyi<sup>9</sup> and I saw sixty to seventy people from Songshan School on their way to Huashan," Sang San Niang reported.

"Of course they're going to Huashan!" Qin Weibang said.

"Why are Songschan School's people going to Huashan for?" Yingying asked.

"Chief obtained the news that after Huashan School's Yue Buqun became the Five Mountains School's Headmaster, he didn't want to be in a disadvantageous position compared to our sacred sect. So later on he gathered all the disciples of the Five Mountains School to Huashan. It seems like he's going to attack the Dark Wood Cliff," Qin Weibang answered.

"Is this true?" Yingying inquired while she was thinking, "This old traitor Qin Weibang is really sly. The capture of the Heng-Shan School's people is most likely the order he received from dad. He's probably the one in charge but he's distancing himself from this matter. But the words of that Sang San Niang didn't seem to be made up. It seems there's something else going on here." She continued, "Master Linghu is the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. Why didn't he know of this matter? That's really strange."

"Subordinate already checked Taishan and Hengshan School, and they're already moving towards Huashan. Heng-Shan School is the only one which hasn't moved yet. Left Protector Xiang sent us an order. He said Elder Bao Dachu is leading some underlings to go to Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard to investigate their movements. He also ordered me to stay close to liaise with him. Subordinate is still waiting for the message from Elder Bao," Qin Weibang said.

Yingying and Linghu Chong looked at each other and they were both thinking, "Bao Dachu going to Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard is most likely true. This Qin Weibang isn't concealing anything, could it be he's telling the truth?"

Qin Weibang bowed towards Linghu Chong and said, "Your lowly servant is just following orders. I'm asking for Headmaster Linghu's forgiveness."

Linghu Chong cupped his fist returning the propriety. "Young lady Ren and I are going to get married within the next few days..." Yingying gasped in surprise and her whole face turned red, but she didn't deny it. Linghu Chong

continued, "Elder Qin received the order from my wife's father, so we as juniors should carry the burden."

Qin Weibang and Sang San Niang turned happy and they happily said, "Congratulations!"

Yingying turned around and walked away.

"Left Protector Xiang urged Elder Bao and I repeatedly not to be rude towards the Heng-Shan School's people. We only have to find the information and we don't have to play rough. Subordinate has followed this order," Qin Weibang said.

Suddenly, there was a girl's voice behind him laughing and saying, "Master Linghu's sword art is matchless in this world. Left Protector Xiang told you not to resort to violence for your own good."

Linghu Chong lifted his head and saw a lady came out from among the trees. She was the Five Poison Sect Chief Blue Phoenix. He laughed and said, "Big sister, you're well."

"Big Brother, you're also well," Blue Phoenix said to Linghu Chong. She then turned her head towards Qin Weibang and said, "If you're saluting me then salute me, why do you need to wrinkle your eyebrows for?"

"I don't dare," Qin Weibang replied. He knew there were poisonous things all over her body and she was not to be trifled with. He rushed forward for a few steps and said to Yingying, "I'd like to ask Sacred Lady for what we should do next."

"Carry on according to Chief's order," Yingying ordered.

Qin Weibang bowed and replied, "Yes." Then Sang San Niang and he gave their proprieties to the three people and left.

Blue Phoenix waited for those two people to walk far before saying, "The nuns from Heng-Shan School have all been captured, you're still not going to rescue them?"

"We just came from Heng-Shan trying to catch up to them, but we haven't seen any sign of them along the way," Linghu Chong replied.



"You're not going towards Huashan, so you're going the wrong way," Blue Phoenix told them.

"Going to Huashan? They've been captured and sent to Huashan? You saw them?" Linghu Chong questioned.

"Early yesterday morning at the Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard, I drank some tea when I tasted something strange but I didn't say anything. Next thing, I saw people falling down one by one so I pretended to be knocked out too," Blue Phoenix said.

"Using drugs against the Five-Sylph Sect's Chief Blue, isn't that just asking for trouble?" said a smiling Linghu Chong.

Blue Phoenix smiled captivatingly. "These bastards really don't know what's good or bad."

"You didn't offer them their poison back?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Why be so polite? There were two bastards who thought I've really been knocked out, so they came over to me and they died on the spot from my poison. The other people were frightened so they didn't dare to come over. They just said that I'm dead and my whole body is very poisonous," After she said this, she giggled and laughed.

"What happened after that?" Linghu Chong queried.

"I wanted to look what they were doing and have been pretending to be unconscious from the beginning. Later on, these bastards took many little nuns down from the Xianxing Peak. The one leading these people was none other than your master, Mr. Yue. Big brother, I see your master is very awful. You're the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, but he actually led people to capture your disciples, grand disciples, old nuns, and little nuns. Isn't this deliberately trying to shame you?" Linghu Chong was quiet. Blue Phoenix continued, "I could only look on in anger and was thinking of killing him with poison right there. But I kept thinking and wasn't sure what you would think. If I really wanted to poison and kill him, it would after all only take a moment."

"You took into consideration my feelings, thank you very much," Linghu Chong said.

"That's nothing. I heard them said that they were taking advantage of you not being at Heng-Shan so they quickly moved to avoid giving you time to return there. There were also people who said you were really lucky that you weren't at the mountain, or else they'd have captured you too and wouldn't they have less problems in the future? Hng, hng!" Blue Phoenix narrated.

"With big sister there, if they wanted to capture me, it won't be that easy," Linghu Chong said.

Blue Phoenix looked pleased and she laughingly said, "That's their good luck. If they dared to harm a single hair on your body, I can say my poison would've killed a hundred of them." She turned her head around towards Yingying and said, "Young lady Ren, don't be jealous. I'm just like his family."

Yingying's face turned red and smiled. "Master Linghu has also mentioned you often. He said you treat him well."

Blue Phoenix was happy. "That's excellent! I was afraid he didn't dare to mention my name in front of you."

"You pretended to be unconscious, so how did you get out?" Yingying asked.

"They were afraid there was poison on my body so none of them dared to touch me. Someone said it would be better to chop me to make sure I'm dead. Some said to shoot projectiles at me. But even though they talked big, none dared to make a move. Then they just walked away. I followed them and saw them really going to Huashan. So once I got out, I went to look for big brother to tell you about this news," Blue Phoenix answered.

"We should really thank you for this or else we would've been chasing them to Dark Wood Cliff and found out there's nothing there. Then we would have to turn around and search for them again. Those old nuns, little nuns, not old not small middle aged nuns, all would've suffered a lot. It's not

good to delay this matter, let's go to Huashan now," Linghu Chong said.

The three of them turned towards the west and travelled at double speed to catch up, but they unexpectedly didn't see a single clue on their way. Linghu Chong and Yingying were both very worried and they both thought, "With several hundred of people in their party, surely, there must be people who have seen them. There must also be traces of them in the restaurants and inns along the way. Could it be this isn't the road they took?"

On the third day at a small restaurant, they saw four people from the Hengshan School. At this time, Linghu Chong had changed his appearance and those people had not recognised him yet. Linghu Chong waited to eavesdrop on them and found out they really were going to Huashan. They were looking jubilant, looking like there were gold and treasure on top of the mountain waiting for them. One of them said, "Luckily Martial Brother Huang was friendly enough to tell us the news, and we were also lucky to be in Shanxi so we could come here quickly. I hope we arrive in time. Our martial brothers in Hengshan have really missed a good opportunity."

Another person said, "It's best if we arrive as early as possible. This kind of matter changes with time."

Linghu Chong wanted to know why they were hurrying to go to Mount Huashan, what kind of scheme was afoot, but these four people did not mention anything along the way at all.

"Do you want to poison then interrogate them?" Blue Phoenix asked.

Linghu Chong remembered how Mr. Mo Da treated him so generously so he didn't want to bully these people. "We'll arrive at Huashan soon enough. We'll know when we get there so we mustn't disturb the grass and startle the snake."

A few days later, at dusk, the three of them arrived at the foot of Mount Huashan. Linghu Chong had grown up at

Huashan so he was very familiar with the area. He said, "We'll go up from a small path behind the mountain, we won't meet anyone there."

Between the five mountains, Mount Huashan was the most rugged. The small path behind the mountain was actually a steep cliff and there was no passable path. It was good that the three people's martial arts were very high and they were able to go up the rugged cliff. With this method, they arrived at Mount Huashan's mountaintop at around two in the morning. Linghu Chong led the other two towards the Hall of Qi Principle. They saw the place was dark with not a single candle to be seen. They hid underneath a window to listen but there was also no sound to be heard. Then they went to the disciples' residence but there wasn't a single soul to be found there as well. Linghu Chong pushed open a window, went in, and lit a candle to have a look. Inside the house was empty, the top of the table and the floor was all covered with dust. After going to a few other houses, they found all the houses were in the same condition. It was obvious the disciples of Huashan had not returned to the mountain yet.

Blue Phoenix felt something was amiss. "Where are those bastards who went up the mountain? They said they were coming to Mount Huashan, did they go somewhere else?"

Linghu Chong was surprised and hesitant as he remembered the day when he attacked Shaolin Temple. The temple was also empty and they repeatedly met with dangers afterwards. Could Yue Buqun be using the same tactic again? But at this time, there were only three of them. Even if they were surrounded, it would be easy to get away. He was just afraid that the Heng-Shan's disciples were being imprisoned in a very secretive place and they had been tarrying for the last few days, so they might not be able to find them anymore. The three of them strained their ears to listen but all they heard was the rustling of the pines and the whole mountain was strangely calm.

"Let's split up to look for them. After two hours, we'll meet here again," Blue Phoenix suggested.

"Ok!" Linghu Chong replied. He believed that Blue Phoenix's skill in using poison was very high and there would be no one who would dare to harm her. But he still advised, "You don't need to fear other people. But if you come across my master, his sword is really fast, you must be really careful!"

Blue Phoenix saw him speaking earnestly. Under the yellow flame, his concern was seen on his face. Her heart was moved on seeing this. "Big brother, I'll definitely pay attention to your advice." She then pushed the door to go out.

Linghu Chong took Yingying to investigate everywhere around there. They had even gone to Tianqin Gorge where the Yue Buqun's husband and wife resided in, but they still had not seen anyone yet.

"This is really fishy. During the past, our Huashan School's disciples were all over the mountain, there are always people left behind here to sweep the ground. But why isn't there anyone here right now?" Linghu Chong said.

At the end, they had finally arrived at Yue Lingshan's room. That room was on the side of Tianqin Gorge, and it was situated very close to the Yue Buqun couple's room. As Linghu Chong got to the front of the room, he remembered of the past days when he frequently came here to take his little martial sister to go out and play or to practice sword. But today, there was nothing to see and he couldn't refrain from shedding his tears. He extended his hand to push the door open but the planks were latched, in that moment he hesitated not knowing what to do. Yingying leapt over the wall, unlatched the planks and open the door. They went inside and lit the candle. The bed and table inside were covered by a layer of dust, and there was nothing on the wall. Even the common objects for girls like comb and dresses were not there.

Linghu Chong thought, "After Little martial sister and Martial Brother Lin got married, they must've moved to another new house and don't live here anymore. All her everyday items have all been taken with her." He then opened up the drawers and saw some small bamboo baskets, stone marbles, cloth dolls, little wooden horse and many other toys. Each of these things was not made by Linghu Chong, but they were the items the two of them had played with in the old days. She had neatly kept everything here. Linghu Chong felt sad and he couldn't bear it anymore, tears flowed and dripped down from his cheeks. Yingying quietly went out and slowly closed the door. Linghu Chong was reluctant to leave Yue Lingshan's room for a long time. Finally, he suppressed his feelings and blew the candle off and walked out of the room.

"Brother Chong, there's one place in Mount Huashan which has a great connection to you. Take me there," Yingying said.

"Ah, you're talking about the Cliff of Repentance. Alright, let's go have a look." He was slightly lost in thought, then he said, "But I'm not sure whether grand martial uncle Feng is there or not?"

He then led the way towards the Cliff of Repentance. Linghu Chong was very familiar with the path. Even though the place wasn't close, they got there very quick. On top of the cliff, Linghu Chong said, "I was inside the cave..." Suddenly they heard two noise of weapons clashing from inside the cave. Both of them were startled and they quickly walked nearer. Someone suddenly cried out, seemingly having been injured. Linghu Chong took out his long sword and rushed forward first. He saw the sealed front entrance to the cave with sword moves engraving had been opened up and there was flickering of flame coming from the inside. Linghu Chong and Yingying entered the cave and their hearts skipped a beat.

There were dozens of torches inside the cave and there were at least two hundred people in there. They were all concentrating on looking at the sword moves engraving on the cave wall. Every single one of them was so absorbed that there wasn't a sound heard. When Linghu Chong and Yingying heard that miserable cry, they were expecting that inside the cave would either be pitch black or there would be fierce fighting with blood spraying all over the place. But how could they have known that the back of the cave would be bright as day and it would also be filled with people. The back of the cave was quite spacious, so even though there were two hundred people there, they weren't too crowded. But with so many people being noiseless, just like corpses, they were really surprised to suddenly see this strange scene.

Yingying slightly leaned on Linghu Chong's left shoulder. Linghu Chong turned around and saw her face was snow white and there was fear in her eyes. So he extended his hand to softly embrace her waist. Then he saw each of these people had different clothes. After looking for a while, he realised they were the disciples from Songshan, Taishan, and Hengshan Schools. Among them, there were some middle aged people with grey hair, there were also some old people with long white beards. It was clear that many seniors from those three schools were also here. However, the people from Huashan and Heng-Shan Schools were not seen among them. The people from these three schools gathered in their own groups and did not mix with each other. The Songshan School's people were observing the wall where the Songshan School's sword moves were, while the Taishan and Hengshan Schools' people were also absorbing the part of the walls where their own sword moves were. Linghu Chong remembered that they had met with four Hengshan's disciples along the way. They mentioned they had gotten news and they were hurrying towards Huashan. That it was of the greatest luck. So it was all because they would have the

opportunity to see the wonderful sword moves engraved on the wall at this cave. After some time, he saw among the Hengshan School's people was a lonesome person with white hair looking at the stone wall with no expression on his face. This person was Mr. Mo Da. Linghu Chong didn't know what to, whether he should go up to pay his respect to him or not.

Suddenly, a person from the Songshan School group angrily shouted, "You're not Songshan's disciple, why are you looking at the drawings?" The one who said this was an old person wearing a dust-yellow gown. He angrily glared at a middle aged person with a tall and strong stature, while the long sword in his hand was pointed at his chest.

That middle aged person snorted and said, "When did I look at the drawings?"

The old person from Songshan School angrily shouted, "You're still thinking of denying it? Which school are you from? If you want to steal Songshan's sword art then I don't care, but what are you doing looking at those moves to break the Songshan's sword art for?" At the same time that he shouted, four to five Songshan's people immediately surrounded that middle aged person and pulled their weapons out.

"I know nothing of your honourable school's sword art, so what's the use of looking at those breaking moves for?" the middle aged person argued.

"You must be harbouring some malicious intentions to be peering at Songshan School's sword moves," the old person from Songshan School replied.

That middle aged person put his hand on his sword handle. He said, "Five Mountains School's headmaster, Mr. Yue, is very kind and he's allowed us to come and have a look at the sword moves on the wall. But he didn't limit us to which moves we can look and which ones we can't."

That old person from Songshan School said, "You're thinking of harming my Songshan School, we won't allow you to."



"Five schools have become one. At this time, there's only Five Mountains School. How can there be Songshan School? If not for five schools becoming one, Mr. Yue would never have permitted you to look at the sword moves in this cave at Huashan," that middle aged person said and that old man was unable to reply back. A disciple of Songshan pushed the back of that middle aged person's shoulder and shouted, "You're very good in turning things over." That middle aged person reached back with his hand and flinged that person's hand away. That Songshan's disciple staggered and fell on the ground.

At this time, a person from the Taishan School suddenly shouted, "Who are you? Wearing our Taishan School's uniform and mixing with us trying to steal the Taishan School's sword art." A youngster wearing the Taishan School's uniform hurriedly rushed out. A person nearest to the exit immediately moved and shouted, "Stop, who are you making trouble here?"

That youngster stabbed out with his sword as he rushed forward. The person blocking the exit sent his left palm out towards his eye. That youngster quickly retreated a step. The person blocking the exit shot his right hand out like the wind, again stabbing at his eye. The youngster's long sword was on the outside so it was difficult for him to block and he was forced to step back again. The person blocking the exit swept his leg, the youngster leapt up to avoid it. Then with a 'peng' sound, his chest had been hit by a palm and he had fallen down on the ground. From behind, two Taishan School's disciples went up to detain him.

At this time, the four Songshan School's people surrounding that middle aged person had attacked with their long swords. That middle aged person swiftly and fiercely fought back, but his sword art didn't belong to the five mountains sword schools. A few Songshan's disciples watching on the side cried out, "This chap isn't from the five mountains sword schools. He's a traitor mixing in with us."

With two fights going on, the quiet mountain cave had turned chaotic. Linghu Chong thought, "My master told these people to come here, it's not because he has a good intention. I'm going to tell Martial uncle Mo and ask him to lead his people out of here. I'll tell him about the Hengshan School's sword art once we got out of the cave." He immediately leaned on the wall to stay in the shadow as he walked near to Mr. Mo Da. He had only gone for a few dozens feet when suddenly a big rumbling sound was heard. It was as if the mountain had cracked.

People were crying out in alarm. Linghu Chong quickly turned around and saw dirt and dust falling around the cave's entrance. He didn't care about finding Mr. Mo Da anymore and was just wishing to go to Yingying, but with lots of people chaotically running away, swords brandished everywhere, dirt falling down around the cave, he couldn't see where Yingying was. He flew out from the cluster of people towards the cave's entrance while dodging swords slashed at him. He shouted desperately but he saw a massive rock which was around tens of thousands of catties heavy dropping on the cave's entrance, firmly shutting the cave in. In panic, he took a glance and it seemed there was no crack to get out.

"Yingying, Yingying!" Linghu Chong shouted. Yingying answered but it sounded like she was somewhere deep inside the cave. But with two hundred people shouting in confusion, he couldn't hear her clearly. He thought, "How come Yingying is inside?" He thought for a while and he understood, "Oh, yes. When that big rock fell down, Yingying was standing on the cave's entrance and she wasn't willing to run by herself, but she was thinking of me. I rushed back to the entrance to look for her, but she was rushing inside to find me." He immediately turned around to rush inside.

Originally, there were dozens of torches inside the cave. But when the big rock fell down and with the confusion going on, there were some who threw their torches away. Thus,

most of the torches had been extinguished. The whole cave was filled with dust and all he could see was fuzzy yellow. He heard people shouting in alarm, "The cave's entrance has been sealed up! The cave's entrance has been sealed up!" There were also people who angrily shouted, "It's that traitor Yue Buqun's plot!" Another person shouted, "That's right. That traitor deceived us to see his \*\*\*\*\* sword art..."

Dozens of people tried to push the big rock. But this big rock was just like a small mountain, even though dozens of people were forcefully pushing it, how could they even move it for an inch? There was also someone who shouted, "Quick, quickly leave from the tunnel." A few people had thought of this earlier. Around twenty of them were pushing each other crowding the entrance to that tunnel. That tunnel was the one dug by the Devil Sect's elders years ago with hatchets and only one person could go through it at a time. So with twenty people crowding together, how could they manage to go in? With this confusion, ten more torches were extinguished.

Two big men from the crowd used their strength to push the people away as they rushed towards the tunnel's entrance. The tunnel's entrance was very narrow and they hit each other, preventing each other from going in. The person on the right hand side swiped his left hand and the big man on the left cried out, a dagger was sticking out of his chest. The big man on the right hand side pushed him away and entered the tunnel. The rest of the crowd pushed and shoved, all of them wanting to enter. Linghu Chong had not seen Yingying yet and he was feeling very worried. He also thought, "The Devil Sect's ten elders had very high martial arts. But because of this plot, they were all buried in here. Today, I'm not sure if Yingying and I can get out of this difficulty. This would be very dangerous if my master is the one who arranged all this."

He saw the crowd was at the tunnel's entrance pushing and shoving. They were all anxious and frightened.

Suddenly, a murderous intention popped into his head, "These chaps are blocking me, I must kill them all then Yingying and I can escape from here." He lifted his long sword wanting to start killing people. But he saw a youngster crouching on the ground with both his hand clutching his hair and his whole body shuddering. His face was ashen. It was obvious he was scared to death. Linghu Chong took pity on him and he pondered, "He and I are friends in difficulty and we've both fallen in this trap. We should cross the river in a boat together, why should I kill him in anger for?" He pulled back his long sword and put it across in front of his chest.

Then he heard the twenty odd people at the tunnel's entrance shouted, "Quickly go in!" "Why aren't you moving?" "Not crawling in?" "Drag him out!" That big man's two feet were still outside and it seemed the tunnel was blocked, but he wasn't willing to crawl back out. Two people stooped down to grab that big man's feet and pulled him out. Suddenly, dozens of people called out in alarm because they had pulled out a headless corpse. The neck was covered with blood. This big man's head had unexpectedly been cut off by someone in the tunnel.

At this time, Linghu Chong saw a person sitting in the corner of the cave, and under the dusky flame, he recognised that person to be Yingying. He was jubilant and quickly rushed there. But after only taking two steps, seven to eight people blocked his way. Currently, the cave was in chaos and everyone looked like they had lost their reasoning just like headless flies flying all over the place. There were some who crazily slashed their swords at random, some were beating their chests crying, some were wrestling each other, and there were some who were crawling on the ground going here and there.

Linghu Chong had squeezed out a few steps when he suddenly felt both of his legs being firmly embraced. He powerfully hit the top of that person's head causing that

person to cry out but he still didn't let go. Linghu Chong shouted, "If you don't let go, I'll kill you." Suddenly, the top of his calf hurt as he had unexpectedly been bitten. Linghu Chong was angry and surprised. He saw everyone was acting like they were crazy, and the torches inside the cave were getting less and less. Now, only two torches were still burning but they were already fallen on the ground. Linghu Chong called out, "Pick up the torches, pick up the torches."

A fat Taoist laughed and stepped on a torch extinguishing it. Linghu Chong lifted his long sword and beheaded that person biting on his calf. Suddenly, everything was dark and nothing could be seen. The last torch had been extinguished.

With the torches extinguished, everyone in the cave suddenly became quiet as they were stunned by this change in situation. But after a short moment had passed, the mad shouting began again. Linghu Chong thought, "We have no chance of getting out of here alive today. It's lucky that I can die here together with Yingying." Thinking up to this point, he felt happy instead of afraid and started going towards where Yingying was. After walking for a few steps, someone suddenly came towards him and powerfully hit him. This person had high inner energy and the hit was swift and fierce. Linghu Chong staggered back for a couple of steps after being hit and turned around for half a circle. He quickly turned back and slowly continued on his way to where Yingying was sitting at. With his ears straining to listen, he heard crying and shouting and dozens of weapons colliding. In the dark, with so many people frightened, most of them were like half crazy and everyone was afraid so they were slashing their weapons about to protect themselves. Some of them had a lot of experience or high internal energy, and they originally remained calm, but with the people besides them randomly swiping their weapons and the mountain cave so crowded, also with no place to dodge in the darkness, besides wielding their own weapons, there was no

other way. He heard weapons clashing, people crying out in pain around them, also injured people moaning and cursing.

Linghu Chong could only hear the weapons splitting the wind all around him. Even though his sword art was high, there was no way for him to use it properly as he could be hit from any direction at any moment. He was feeling really worried so he immediately swiped his long sword to protect his upper body. Step by step, he moved towards the cave wall. Once he reached the wall, he could lean on it while walking and avoid a lot of dangers, just like that person resembling Yingying leaning on the wall while sitting down. With that method of walking, he would be able to meet her soon. From where he was standing, he was still dozens of feet away from the cave wall. But the blades were like the forest and the swords were like the rain, every inch was fraud by danger and every step was fraud with death.

Linghu Chong thought, "If I die under the hand of a master then it would be sweet. But in this situation, I can just get killed anytime by something mysterious. And the one who killed me is probably some idiot who knows a bit of martial art only. Even if Hero Dugu lived again and met with this kind of situation, I'm afraid he probably also can't find a way out." As he thought of Dugu Qiubai, he was enlightened, "That's right, in today's situation, if I don't kill someone mysteriously then I'll be the one killed mysteriously. When I kill one, that'll be one less person to kill me." His long sword trembled out using the 'Arrow Breaking Stance' of the 'Dugu Nine Sword', his sword stabbed out to the front, back, left, and right. Once he used the sword stance, a few people around him cried out miserably and dropped to the ground. He felt his sword entered the flesh of someone and he heard that person cried out lightly. It was the voice of a girl. Linghu Chong was greatly startled and his hand became weak and he nearly dropped his long sword. His heart was thumping, "Was that Yingying? Did I just kill Yingying!" He shouted desperately, "Yingying, Yingying, is that you?"

But there was no sound coming from that girl. He was very familiar with Yingying's voice and that light cry was not actually from her and very easily distinguishable. But with many voices mixed inside the cave, the lightness of this girl's cry, his worried heart, and his chaotic mind, he felt that it was Yingying but at the same time also felt that it wasn't her. He called out again for a few times but there was still no answer so he stooped down to feel around the ground. Suddenly, a kick came flying in and kicked him squarely on his butt. Linghu Chong flew up and while his body was in mid air, his left leg hurt as someone gave it a whip. He quickly used his left hand to cover his head, and with a 'bang', his arm along with his head had hit the top of the cave. As he was dropping back down, he felt his head, his arm, legs, and butt were all covered in pain, like his whole body was about to be shattered into pieces. He calmed himself down and called out "Yingying" again for a couple more times. Hearing his own voice, he sounded hoarse like he was crying. His heart was feeling miserable and desperate as he shouted, "I've killed Yingying, I've killed Yingying!" With his long sword slashing left and right, he rushed forward and killed a few people.

In this clamour, he suddenly heard two 'zheng, zheng' sound. This was the sound of a yaoqin. Even though the sound of this qin was light, in Linghu Chong's ears they were just like thunder startling him. He was rapt and quickly called out, "Yingying, Yingying!"

Right at this time, he wanted to go to where the sound of that qin was coming from. But as he thought about it, the sound of that qin came from some distance away. This one hundred feet distance was a hundred times more dangerous when compared to walking in Jianghu for a hundred thousand li. To be able to walk this one hundred feet distance without dying was actually very difficult. This sound of qin was of course from Yingying and since she's alright, then he mustn't just throw his life away. If the two of them couldn't

die together hand in hand then they would suffer endless regret in the nine fountain. He retreated back for a couple of steps and leaned his back on the cave wall. He thought, "This is much safer." Suddenly he felt a strong wind of someone slashing his weapon rushing at him. Linghu Chong thrust his sword out, but just as he moved his long sword, he immediately knew things were far from good.

The essence of 'Dugu Nine Sword' was at looking at the flaw of the opponent's movements and attacking that point. Thrust later but arriving first, one move to take victory. But in this dark cave, he couldn't even see his enemy or his enemy's movement, so how could he see the flaw in the movement? At this situation, 'Dugu Nine Sword' was completely useless. The long sword in Linghu Chong's hand had only thrust out for a foot when he hastily dodged to the left. Then he heard a breaking sound followed by a crashing sound and lastly a miserable cry. He guessed that person's weapon must have first struck against the wall and broke, and the broken weapon then had stabbed his own body.

Linghu Chong heard that person had gone quiet and guessed he must have died. He pondered, "Although my sword art is high, it is just like any other ordinary person in this dark cave. I just have to bear with it patiently and wait for a chance to meet up with Yingying." But he heard the sound of fighting and the shouting had lessened because at this time many people had been injured or killed. He quickly brandished his long sword in front of his body to form a sword net in case someone suddenly attacked him. The sound of the yaoqin was intermittent like the string was plucked one by one, and it was not making up any tune. Linghu Chong was again worried, "Is Yingying injured? Or maybe she's not the one playing the qin? But if it's not her, how can there be another person who also has a qin?" After a long time, the shouting finally stopped. There were many people moaning and groaning on the ground. Occasionally, there was a sound of weapon clashing coming from around the wall. Linghu



Chong thought, "The people who aren't dead are around the wall. These people must be masters in Wulin and their thoughts are sharp." He shouted repeatedly, "Yingying, where are you?" The qin sounded a few times as if answering him.

Linghu Chong flew forward. When his left foot landed, he felt something soft. He had landed on someone's body and at the same time he felt the wind whistling as a weapon was slashing upwards. Because his internal energy was abundant, even though he couldn't see the enemy's weapon coming, he was still aware of it. He quickly used strength on his left foot and leapt back to the cave wall. He pondered, "The ground is full of people lying down and some are injured. I can't go across." Then he heard the wind whistling caused by the people leaning their backs on the cave wall slashing their weapons about to protect themselves; in this moment of time, a few more people were either injured or killed.

Suddenly, an elder spoke, "Friends, we've fallen into Yue Buqun's trap. We must work together to get out of here. We can't just swing our weapons around and kill one another."

"That's right, that's right!" many people replied together.

When Linghu Chong heard their voices, he gathered there were around sixty to seventy of them. All these people had their backs to the wall and they were standing motionless. One was because they had calmed down. Secondly, because temporarily they weren't worried about their lives so they were able to calmly think things through.

That elder said, "I'm Taishan School's Yuzhongzi. Everyone, please sheathe your weapon. Everyone is in the dark, so when you bump into someone, you mustn't hurt anyone. Friends, do you agree?"

"That should be the way," those people boomed their replies and the sound of weapons slashing lessened. Some people who were still brandishing their weapons also stopped after a while.

"I'd also like everyone to swear an oath. If anyone here hurt anyone else, then he'll be buried here and won't get to see the sky again. I, Taishan's Yuzhongzi, swear to this oath first," Yuzhongzi said.

The rest of the people swore this oath while thinking in their hearts, "This Priest Yuzhongzi is very experienced. If we all work together, there's still a chance that we'd get out of here. Otherwise, we'll be randomly chopping each other just like before."

"Very good! Please say your name," Yuzhongzi requested.

At that time, people started saying, "I'm Hengshan's so and so." "I'm Taishan's so and so." "I'm Songshan's so and so." But Mr. Mo Da's name was never heard.

After these people had finished speaking, Linghu Chong announced himself, "I'm Heng-Shan School's Linghu Chong." The crowd gasped in surprised and they said, "Heng-Shan's Headmaster, Hero Linghu, is here. That's very good." Their tone of voice was happy.

Linghu Chong thought, "I'm just a waste, what's so good about me?" He of course understood. These people knew his martial art was very high. So with him around, their hope of escaping had gone up by many notches.

"I'd like to ask Headmaster Linghu something. Why did your honourable school only send headmaster here all by yourself?" Yuzhongzi queried. This person was experienced and very careful so he was suspicious that Linghu Chong was hiding something that might be harmful towards them. When Linghu Chong came out of Huashan, he did so as Yue Buqun's disciple. Everyone knew about this. But as they were trapped inside this mountain cave, from amongst the hundreds of disciples from Huashan and Heng-Shan, he was the only person there who belonged to either. It was unavoidable that people would suspect him.

"I have another companion..." Linghu Chong replied and he couldn't help calling out again, "Ying..." But he had only managed to call out 'Ying' before a thought flashed in his

mind, "Yingying is the Sun Moon Sect's Chief's only daughter and both the righteous and demonical are like fire and water. I mustn't put this thing on top of what's happening already." So he immediately shut his mouth.

"Who has a torch beside him? Please light it up first," Yuzhongzi requested.

The crowd cheered loudly, "Very good, very good!" "We're all so muddle headed, why didn't we think of that?" "Quickly light up the torches!" Actually, in the middle of the chaos before, everyone was only thinking of protecting himself so how could they think of lighting up a torch? Besides, as soon as a torch was lighted, that person would be killed instantly by the person next to him. But now he heard many rattling sound as some people took out their flint and steel to make fire. Soon after, many dots of flames were seen and it felt very bright in the darkness. The people inside the mountain cave started cheering.

Linghu Chong took a glance and saw the surrounding cave wall was full of people. Their bodies and faces were splashed with blood. There were also some who still slowly swiping their swords and sabres in front of their bodies. These people were extremely careful, even though they had heard everyone swearing an oath, they still didn't believe the person next to them. Linghu Chong took a step to go to the opposite wall wanting to find Yingying. Suddenly, from among the cluster of people, someone shouted, "Move!" Seven to eight people came out of the tunnel brandishing their long swords and started killing people.

"Who are you?" the crowd shouted and one by one they drew their own weapons to defend. After some time, the torches had again been extinguished. Linghu Chong shot forward and leapt towards the opposite wall. He felt a weapon hacking from his right hand side and in the darkness he didn't know how to block it. He rushed at the ground and heard a 'dang' sound. A sabre had clashed with the wall. He thought, "This person doesn't necessarily want to kill me. He

might just be wanting to defend himself in the darkness." He stayed down on the ground quietly. After that person hacked at empty space for a few more times, he stopped.

Someone shouted, "Kill all these dogs, don't leave any behind!" More than ten people acknowledged this order. This was followed by six to seven people shouting, "It's Zuo Lengchan! Zuo Lengchan!" Then some people shouted, "Master, disciple's here!"

Linghu Chong heard the person barking the order was really Zuo Lengchan, he pondered, "Why is he here? This trap was set up by this bastard, it wasn't my Master after all." Even though Yue Buqun had tried to kill him several times already, the master-disciple and father-son relationship between them had stretched for more than twenty years and they were deep-rooted in his heart. He simply couldn't forget them. Once he thought that the traitor setting this up wasn't Yue Buqun, he couldn't help feeling happy. He was a hundred times happier to die under Zuo Lengchan's hand than to die under his Master's hand.

He only heard Zuo Lengchan gloomily said, "You still have the face to call me master? You didn't report to me before you went to Huashan. This is deceiving your master and betraying your school. How can our school have such despicable disciples like you?"

"Master," A booming voice replied. "Disciple got the message that a cave in the Cliff of Contemplation at Huashan has our own school's wonderful sword art. I was afraid I'd be wasting time going back and forth and telling master about this first, and the sword moves on the wall would be destroyed by someone. So I quickly came here. After I look at the sword art, I'd of course go back to the mountain immediately and tell master all these sword arts."

"You're taking advantage of my blindness," Zuo Lengchan said. "I know you all considered me useless since long ago. Once you learned these wonderful sword art, would you still recognise me as your master? Yue Buqun wanted all

of you to pledge your loyalties to him before he'd let you come into this cave to look at the sword moves. Didn't this happen?"

"Yes, dis... disciple should die," that Songshan disciple answered. "But this is just a temporary measure. Our five mountain sword schools have merged into one and he's the headmaster. So we should... should also listen to his order. But I never thought this traitor would behave so violently and trapped all of us down here."

Another person said, "Master, please lead us to escape from here. We'll then go find that traitor Yue Buqun to settle our debt."

Zuo Lengchan snorted. "What a wishful thinking you have there." He paused for a while then continued, "Linghu Chong, you're also here, what are you doing here?"

"This is my old place, if I want to come then I just come!" Linghu Chong replied. "What are you doing here?"

Zuo Lengchan laughed coldly and replied, "Death is imminent and you're still so rude towards your senior."

"You plotted secretly and caused the harm of the world's heroes," Linghu Chong said. "Everyone wants to punish you for this, and you still consider yourself to be a senior?"

"Pingzhi," Zuo Lengchan said. "Kill him!"

"Yes!" someone answered in the dark. It was Lin Pingzhi's voice.

Linghu Chong was startled and he thought, "So Lin Pingzhi is also here. Both Zuo Lengchan and him are blind, so these days they must be familiar on how to use the sword blind. Using their ears to replace their eyes, their technique on listening to the wind to distinguish attacks must be good now. In this darkness, the situation is turned, it is me who is blind while they're the ones who aren't blind. But why are they the enemy?" But his back was covered in cold sweat.

Then he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "Linghu Chong, you're very glorious and your name is very famous in Jianghu. But

today you're going to die under my hands, haha, haha!" His laughter was full of gloom. Step by step he came over.

Just then when Linghu Chong and Zuo Lengchan were talking, Lin Pingzhi had heard him clearly and his position had been given away. The whole cave was quiet and only Lin Pingzhi's footsteps were heard. With each step of his, Linghu Chong knew he was one step closer to the death's door. Suddenly, someone shouted, "Wait! This Linghu Chong blinded my eyes and caused me to be unable to see the daylight from then on. Let me kill this bastard." More than ten people echoed what he said and they quickly walked over. Linghu Chong was startled. He knew they were the fifteen people who he had blinded on that night outside the abandoned temple. That day on his way towards Songshan for the merger of the five schools, he met these people on the way. These people had been blinded for a long time, and their abilities to use their ears to replace their eyes must be high. He already couldn't defend against one Lin Pingzhi, now with the addition of these fifteen people, he was totally outclassed.

He heard their footsteps while he quietly slid for a few steps towards the left. Then he heard a few 'ta, ta, ta' noise as a few long swords were stabbed at the wall where he was standing at previously. Luckily, these ten or so people attacked at the same time causing the noise to blend with the footsteps sound concealing his footsteps. No one knew where he had gone to. Linghu Chong stooped down and felt a sword on the ground. He tossed it, and with a clanking sound, it hit the wall. Those ten or so blind men rushed over with their weapons raised, and they started fighting with some people. Shouting erupted and in a few moment six to seven people were killed. These people didn't have weak martial arts, but they couldn't see a thing in this darkness, so they weren't the match of these blind men.

Linghu Chong took advantage of this shouting to slide a few more steps to the left. He groped around to feel there

was no one around the wall before he quietly crouched down and pondered, "Zuo Lengchan brought Lin Pingzhi and those blind men here to do battle in the dark. They're going to annihilate all of us here. But how does he know there's this kind of cave here?" As soon as he thought about it, he was enlightened, "Yes! That day little martial sister was on top of the place of worship, she fought using the moves engraved on the wall here. She defeated the masters from Taishan and Hengshan. She also used Songshan sword art in front of Zuo Lengchan and used the Heng-Shan sword art to fight against me. Since she came here before, Lin Pingzhi of course knows about it too." As he thought of little martial sister, his heart ached.

He heard Lin Pingzhi shouted, "Linghu Chong, you don't dare to reveal yourself, pulling in your head and tail. What kind of hero is that?"

Linghu Chong was angered and he wanted to get out to fight to the death with him, but he restrained himself. He thought, "A gentleman can bend and straighten. How can I get so irritated over him? I haven't found Yingying yet, I can't die so easily just like that." He also thought, "I once promised little martial sister to tend to Lin Pingzhi. If I come out and fight with him then got killed by him, that would be unworthy. But it's also not right if I kill him."

"There are turncoats in this cave, traitors who need to be killed," Zuo Lengchan shouted. "Even if you forgive Linghu Chong, there's nowhere he can go to!"

A short time later, clashing of weapons and shouting erupted. Linghu Chong squatted on the ground. After a short while, still no one attacked him. He strained to listen to Yingying's voice while pondering, "Yingying is far more careful and cleverer than me. In the middle of this ambush, she'd definitely not play her qin. I only hope no sword is being thrust at her." He heard the fighting between the crowd and those blind men was really fierce, they were fighting fiercely while also hurling curses. The curse 'scram

your granny' was even heard. This 'scram your granny' was really grating to the ears. When common people uses this swear words, they always say 'go to your mum', or 'hold your granny', sometimes people also use 'scram your mother bastard', but it was rare to hear someone uses 'scram your granny'. Linghu Chong pondered, "Is this a swear word special to their provinces?" After listening for a while, he found that this swear word 'scram your granny' was used quite often by a few people. Once this swear word was uttered by both people fighting, the fighting would stop immediately. But if only one person uttered this swear word, then the fighting between them would continue. He immediately understood, "So this is the code for those blind men to distinguish each other." In that darkness, randomly slashing and killing, it was hard to determine friends or foes. Those blind men had determined a code beforehand and when they started fighting they would first called out this swear word 'scram your granny'. When two people cursed the same swear word, they were friends. Otherwise, they would kill their opponents. No one uses this swear word, so this code word was something that the enemy wouldn't use to curse someone with.

Once he understood this, he immediately stood up and put his sword in front of his chest. The swearing of 'scram your granny' was getting more frequent, while the clashing of weapons and the shouting were gradually dying. It seemed the people from Taishan, Hengshan, and Songshan Schools had been massacred. Linghu Chong had not heard of Yingying's voice. He was worried that Yingying had been killed earlier, but he was also happy that she didn't suffer under the hands of these blind men. He also thought, "The disciples of Songshan must've found out the cave in Huashan contained their own school's wonderful sword art so they quickly came here to take a look. This behaviour is quite common in people. But they didn't have time to report, so Zuo Lengchan just decided to kill them all and doesn't hold



back at all. He must be thinking of killing me, but since he can't distinguish anyone, he even killed all his disciples who had only done a little bit of wrong." After some time, the sound of fighting ceased.

"Everyone," Zuo Lengchan shouted. "Go around the cave and give them another chop."

The blind men acknowledged his order, then the sound of sword slashing was heard going here and there. Two swords were chopping down in front of Linghu Chong, and he lifted his sword to block. Two hoarse voices shouting 'scram your granny' were heard and unexpectedly nobody realised what had happened. After some time, besides those blind men cursing and the clashing of weapons, there was no other noise. But Linghu Chong was still worried and he nearly cried, wanting to cry out, "Yingying, Yingying, where are you?"

"Stop!" Zuo Lengchan commanded.

Those blind men sheathed their swords and stood still. Zuo Lengchan laughed happily and said, "Those traitors have all been eliminated. These shameless people, just because they wanted to learn some sword moves, they actually swore loyalty to that bastard Yue Buqun. That little bastard Linghu Chong must've died under your swords! Haha! Haha! Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong, are you dead yet?" Linghu Chong held his breath and didn't reply.

"Pingzhi," Zuo Lengchan said. "Today, you've killed the person you hate the most. You must be satisfied."

"The whole battle was thought of by Brother Zuo," Lin Pingzhi replied. "It was wonderfully set up."

Linghu Chong thought, "Zuo Lengchan and him are praising each other. In order to get his Evil Resisting Sword Art, Zuo Lengchan is being very polite to him."

"If you didn't know of another secret path into this tunnel," Zuo Lengchan said. "It would've been hard for us to get our revenge."

"But it's a pity," Lin Pingzhi. "In all that confusion I didn't get the chance to kill that little bastard Linghu Chong myself."

Linghu Chong thought, "I've never offended him before. Why does he detest me so much?"

"It doesn't matter who killed him, it's all the same," Zuo Lengchan replied in whisper. "Let's go out quickly. I think Yue Buqun should be guarding outside of the cave now. We should take advantage of the darkness to rush out."

"Yes!" Lin Pingzhi acknowledged. The sound of footsteps was heard as their party entered the tunnel. Sound of footsteps gradually got farther away, and after a while, it was all quiet.

"Yingying," Linghu Chong whispered. "Where are you?" His voice sounded like he was weeping.

Suddenly, someone from above his head whispered, "I'm here. Don't make any noise!"

Linghu Chong was happy and both his knees became soft as he sat down on the ground. When those blind men randomly slashed their swords around, the safest place to be was up there. A place where no weapon can reach. This was a very obvious and simple point, but when faced with death, everyone's mind was in chaos and didn't think of this.

Yingying leapt down. Linghu Chong jumped up and tossed his sword away before embracing her tightly. They were both sobbing happily. Linghu Chong lightly kissed her forehead and whispered, "You really frightened me to death just before."

In the darkness, Yingying didn't avoid it and she lightly replied, "You were cursing people 'scram your granny'. Nevertheless, I heard it was your voice."

Linghu Chong couldn't help smiling as he asked, "You're not injured at all?"

"No."

"I heard the qin's sound before and wasn't worried anymore. But then I felt that I've stabbed a girl and the qin's

sound became broken, not making up a tune, so I thought I've wounded you. Later on, there was no sound at all and I didn't know what had happened."

Yingying smiled. "I've jumped up there early on. I was afraid someone might find out so I couldn't call out to you. So I had to toss coins down to strike that yaoqin to let you know."

Linghu Chong sighed and said, "That's how it is. I never knew. I deserve to be hit, deserve to be hit!" He took her hand and lightly hit his own cheeks. "You're marrying such a stupid man," Linghu Chong chuckled. "This can be considered to be Young Lady Ren's bad luck. I felt it was really odd. If you were the one playing the yaoqin, why weren't you playing the 'Song of Peace and Serenity' or maybe the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer'?"

Yingying let him hugged her. "If I could toss coins in the darkness to make the yaoqin play out a tune, then I'll be a deity."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "You are a deity."

When Yingying heard his words were teasing her, she struggled wanting to get away from his embrace. Linghu Chong tightly held on to her and asked, "Later on, why did you stop throwing the coins to strike the qin?"

"I'm poor," Yingying laughingly replied. "I don't have that much money on me. After throwing a few of them, I ran out."

Linghu Chong sighed. "It's a pity there's no money farm in this cave, there's also no store here. Young lady Ren has no money to use and there's no place to borrow money."

Yingying also laughed and said, "After that, I even used my hairpin and earrings. But when those blind men started killing, I didn't dare to throw things anymore because their hearings are very acute."

Suddenly, there was a gloomy cold laugh coming from the tunnel's entrance. Linghu Chong and Yingying gasped in surprise. Linghu Chong's left arm embraced Yingying while

his right hand grabbed the long sword on the ground. He shouted, "Who's there?"

That person coldly replied, "Hero Linghu, it's me!" The voice was Lin Pingzhi's. Then they heard footsteps coming from the tunnel, the blind men had returned.

Linghu Chong scolded himself for being so careless. Zuo Lengchan was an old bastard and he was also very cunning, so how could he just go like that? They must've stayed in the tunnel listening to the noises inside the cave. If he was by himself, he would've wasted some time before trying to escape. But with Yingying and him worrying over each other and delighted over their reunion, he didn't think the enemy could've stayed not far from there and was watching them from the outside. Yingying put her hand underneath Linghu Chong's armpit and whispered, "Go up!" The two of them jumped up.

Yingying had earlier rested on the rock jutting out of the wall so she knew where it was. In the darkness, she applied the right amount of force to go up and steadily landed on it. But Linghu Chong missed and he instead landed back down. Yingying grabbed his arm and pulled him back up. This rock only jutted out for around three to four feet. Both of them were crowded and it wasn't easy for them to steadily stand there. Linghu Chong thought, "Yingying thinks very fast. Both of us are on top looking down, so it won't be easy for those blind men to attack us."

"Those two little ghosts jumped up," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Yes!" Lin Pingzhi acknowledged.

"Linghu Chong," Zuo Lengchan said. "Are you going to hide up there for the rest of your life?"

Linghu Chong didn't reply. He was thinking if he uttered a single noise then his hiding place would be discovered. His right hand held his sword while his left hand was wrapped around Yingying's waist. Yingying's left hand was holding a short sword and her right hand was also wrapped around his

waist. They felt comforted to be able to be together, they had no regret even if they had to die right now.

"Who blinded your eyes?" Zuo Lengchan shouted. "Have you forgotten it?"

More than ten blind men roared and jumped up while randomly thrusting. Linghu Chong and Yingying still didn't make any sound, and those blind men stabbed at empty spaces. The second time they leapt up, one of the blind men was only around a foot beyond the jutting rock. Linghu Chong heard the wind around him as he jumped up, he thrust his sword forward and pierced the blind man's chest. That blind man cried out and fell on the ground. With that happened, the others discovered their hiding place. Six to seven people leapt up at the same time slashing and thrusting their swords. Even though Linghu Chong and Yingying couldn't see those blind men, the distance between the jutting rock and the ground was around twenty feet. The people jumping up produced a lot of wind noise so they were easy to distinguish. They thrust their swords out and killed two people. The rest of the blind men looked up and hurled abuses at them. For a while, they didn't dare to leap up and attack.

A short time later, the sound of wind was heard and two people had jumped up from the left and right. Linghu Chong and Yingying lifted their swords to block.

'Zheng, zheng'. Four swords collided.

Linghu Chong's right hand ached and his long sword was nearly knocked out of his hand. He knew the person who had attacked was Zuo Lengchan himself. Yingying cried out in pain as her shoulder was hit by a sword and she swayed. Linghu Chong quickly pulled her in with his left hand. Those two people jumped up again to attack. Linghu Chong thrust his long sword towards the person attacking Yingying. Both swords collided, and that person's long sword changed quickly into a slash. Linghu Chong knew this enemy was Lin Pingzhi. There was no time to block the incoming sword so he

quickly lowered his head and stooped his body. He felt the cold wind as Lin Pingzhi slashed at Yingying. His body was in mid air but he unexpectedly was able to do three moves. This Evil Resisting Sword Art was truly formidable.

Linghu Chong was afraid he might injure Yingying so he hugged her and leapt down with her. With his back leaning on the cave wall, he started to slash his sword around. Suddenly he heard Zuo Lengchan's long laugh. A sword attacked and with a clashing sound, both swords had again collided. Linghu Chong was shaken and he felt a little internal energy coming from the sword. His whole body involuntarily shook. Suddenly he remembered of the day when Ren Woxing was at Shaolin Temple using his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' to suck Zuo Lengchan's internal energy. Who could've known that Zuo Lengchan's internal energy would be so formidable that in just a short time, Ren Woxing was frozen. This time he was doing the same strategy again and to avoid falling into his trap, Linghu Chong quickly pushed the internal energy out but suddenly he felt a tremendous energy coming back, and his fingers involuntarily loosened and his sword flew out of his hand. Linghu Chong's whole skill depended on a long sword, so he quickly stooped down and felt around the ground for another sword. More than two hundred people had died inside that cave and the ground was filled with weapons so he could just pick a sabre up and hold up momentarily. Yingying and he had turned blind in this cave while being attacked by these ten or so blind men who had turned not blind. It was no luck that they had survived so far, but no matter what, they were unwilling to just give up their lives so easily. After feeling around for a while, he touched the face of a dead person. It was cold and sticky, he hastily hugged Yingying and retreated for a couple of steps.

'Zheng, zheng!' Yingying brandished her short sword to block the incoming thrust from the two swords. This was followed by a cry as the short sword in Yingying's hand was

knocked flying off. Linghu Chong was worried, he stooped down again and found something that felt like a short stick. In this critical situation, he didn't have time to think when he felt a strong wind rushing from his front. Another sword had slashed at him. He immediately put the stick up to block. With a cracking sound, that short stick was cut off by the sword.

Linghu Chong lowered his head to let the long sword go pass. Suddenly, he saw some light dots in front of him. These light dots were very weak, but inside this dark cave, they were just like a star coming out of the horizon. The enemies' bodies and their swords could be distinguished faintly. Linghu Chong and Yingying gasped at the same time as they saw Zuo Lengchan thrust his sword again. Linghu Chong lifted his short stick to stab it at Zuo Lengchan's throat, which was exactly the flaw in his sword move. Unexpectedly, even though Zuo Lengchan was blind, his response was still very fast as he used the move 'Carp Leaping Over the Dragon Gate' to leap back while his mouth was cursing loudly. Yingying stooped down, picked up a long sword, took the short stick from Linghu Chong's hand, and at the same time gave the long sword to him. She brandished the short stick causing glimmering around the cave.

Linghu Chong's spirit was greatly roused. As this was a matter of life and death, he didn't hold back. With a curse 'scram your granny', he killed a blind man. The sword coming out of his hand was much faster than the cursing coming out of his mouth. After swearing six of these 'scram your granny', the twelve blind men in the cave had all been killed. Moreover, some of these blind men were slow witted, so hearing him screaming 'scram your granny', they thought he was one of their own, so why would they need to fight? They had not realised anything when the sword had already pierced their throats and they were on their way to death's door to see their grannies.

Zuo Lengchan and Lin Pingzhi didn't understand what was going on, they both asked, "Is there a torch?" Their voices were frightened.

"That's right!" Linghu Chong shouted as he attacked Zuo Lengchan three times. Zuo Lengchan distinguished the incoming attack from the wind and managed to block the three attacks, but Linghu Chong felt his arm was aching. It was the cold energy coming from the sword again. After a tick, everything was still as he held his sword motionless. Zuo Lengchan couldn't hear the wind from his sword and he was getting anxious. He vigorously slashed his sword to protect the fatal points around his body.

Linghu Chong relied on the faint light coming out of the short stick in Yingying's hand as he slowly sent his sword forward, and slowly aimed it at Lin Pingzhi's right arm. Inch by inch, it crept forward. Lin Pingzhi was straining his ear trying to listen to his sword path, but Linghu Chong's sword was slowly going inch by inch, so how could he hear anything? The point of the sword was now only half a foot away from his right arm. With a jerk, it shot forward and hit Lin Pingzhi's right arm's bone and flesh. Lin Pingzhi cried out and dropped his long sword, while his body flew upwards. Linghu Chong stabbed twice and got both of his legs. Lin Pingzhi fell down on the ground cursing and swearing loudly. Linghu Chong turned around and saw Zuo Lengchan. Under the faint light, he saw him gritting his teeth and his expression terrifying while he was slashing his long sword around. Even though the sword moves he was using were very wonderful, but under 'Dugu Nine Sword', there was no place that was flawless.

Linghu Chong thought, "This person is the one who incited the disturbance in Wulin. I can't go easy on him!"

With a roar, he brandished his long sword. Zuo Lengchan was stabbed between the eyes, throat, and chest. Linghu Chong leapt back for two steps and pulled Yingying's hand. He saw Zuo Lengchan standing there for a long time before



falling on the ground. His long sword turned over and stabbed his own stomach until it penetrated all the way through. Both of them calmed themselves down. They looked at the short stick in Yingying's hand but the light was too dim so they couldn't see it clearly. They had no torch on their bodies and Linghu Chong was afraid Lin Pingzhi might attack them again so he cut off the tendons in his left arm. Then he went to the dead people's body to fish out some flint and steel, after feeling out the second person, that person's bosom was also empty. He thought for a while then shouted, "Scram your granny, of course these blind men aren't bringing any flint and steel." When he felt the fifth person, he finally found flint and steel and light up a paper.

The two of them shouted in surprise.

The stick in Yingying's hand was unexpectedly a bone with one of its ends cut off to a sharp point! Yingying was stupified and she threw that bone on the ground. She then laughingly cursed, "Scram your..." She only uttered these two words when she felt they were not elegant so she immediately pursed her lips up.

Linghu Chong suddenly understood. "Yingying, both our lives were saved by this divine sect's senior."

"Divine sect's senior?" Yingying queried.

"Back then, ten elders from the divine sect attacked Huashan. They were all imprisoned in this cave without any way of escaping, and they all died with unsatisfied regret. All they left behind were ten sets of bones. This thigh bone, I don't know which elder it belonged to. I accidentally picked that one up and Zuo Lengchan luckily cut a section off it. This bone has this phosphorus light that the two of us can use to see," Linghu Chong explained.

Yingying let out a long sigh then bowed towards that bone and said, "So it's our sect's elder, sorry for the offence."

Linghu Chong took a few more paper and lighted them up. Then he found two torches and lighted them up also. "I wonder what happened to Martial Uncle Mo?" Then he

shouted, "Martial Uncle Mo, Martial Uncle Mo!" But there was still no sound. Linghu Chong felt in his heart that Martial Uncle Mo cared for him. So he was feeling sad that he had died in this cave today. He glanced around the ground looking at the corpses, but it was very difficult to search for Mr. Mo Da's corpse. He thought, "We haven't escaped from danger yet, we can't linger around here. I'll come back later to look for Martial Uncle Mo's corpse then I'll bury him properly."

Linghu Chong turned around and pulled on Lin Pingzhi's chest as he went towards the tunnel. Yingying knew he had promised Yue Lingshan to tend to Lin Pingzhi. So without saying anything, she picked up that yaoqin which had holes in a few places and followed behind him. They used the narrow tunnel that had been dug by those elders to go out step by step.

Linghu Chong lifted his sword up to be prepared. He was thinking Zuo Lengchan was very calculating and since the cave's entrance had been sealed, then he surely would have dispatched people to guard the narrow tunnel. He had to be careful of the guard trying to stop him inside the cave. But after walking all the way through the tunnel, he still saw no one. Linghu Chong softly opened the stone covering up the entrance, and he felt the light dazzling his eyes. The ferocious fight inside the cave had gone on for so long that he didn't feel how much time had actually passed, and the sky had actually turned bright. He saw there was no one outside the cave and he immediately pulled Lin Pingzhi out, and Yingying followed him out. There was a sword in Linghu Chong's hand, enough light for him to see, he was at a spacious place, they had really gone out of danger. He sucked in a breath of fresh air and felt unspeakable comfort.

"When your master punished you before, was it at this cave?" Yingying asked.

"That's right. What do you think?" Linghu Chong laughingly replied.

Yingying smiled. "I think you weren't here meditating, but your..." She was thinking of saying 'your little martial sister', but why would she mention Yue Lingshan to make him sad? So she quickly stopped.

"Grand martial uncle Feng lives somewhere nearby. I wonder if he's doing fine. I've always thought of this. He first said, he doesn't want to meet anyone from Huashan School, but I'm no longer in Huashan School," Linghu Chong said.

"Yes. Let's go meet him," Yingying said.

Linghu Chong sheathed his sword and let go of Lin Pingzhi. He pulled on Yingying's hand and went out of the cave.

# **Chapter 39: No Treaty**

Translated by: Pokit

Edited by: Hhaung



**The earthshaking chanting of "Thousands of years, rule the Martial World" went on and on by cult members**

**kneeling down. Sunshine covered Ren Woxing's face and his entire body. The majestic looking Chief of the Sun-Moon Cult looked like a god.**

They walked out of the cave and suddenly saw a black shape moving on top of their heads. It looked like something had fallen down on them. Linghu Chong and Yingying simultaneously dodged it, but who could've thought the object dropping was a large fish net and it trapped the two of them in there. Startled, they quickly drew their swords to cut the net, but after slashing for a few times, the net was unexpectedly untouched. At this time, another fish net was thrown from above covering both of them. The person above the cave leapt down with a rope in his hand tightening the net.

"Master!" the word escaped from Linghu Chong's mouth. That person really was Yue Buqun. The net got tighter and tighter as Yue Buqun pulled on the rope. Linghu Chong and Yingying were just like a couple of big fishes being entangled inside a net. They were able to struggle in the beginning, but at the end, they couldn't even move. Frightened, Yingying didn't know what to do. She took a glance and saw Linghu Chong was smiling, looking very relaxed. She thought, "Has he thought of a way to escape?"

Yue Buqun had a fierce looking smile on his face. "Little traitor, you were complacent coming out of the cave. Didn't expect trouble out here, did you?"

"It's not trouble. When someone's going to die, dying with his wife is the happiest thing," Linghu Chong replied nonchalantly.

Yingying understood. His face was looking happy because he would be able to die together with her. Her fear disappeared, replaced with a wave of happiness.

Linghu Chong continued, "If you kill both of us like this, then you wouldn't be able to separate us."

"Little traitor," Yue Buqun indignantly said. "Death is imminent and you're still boasting!"

He then wrapped the rope around them for a few times, bunching them up tightly.

"This fish net of yours, you got it from Old Man, didn't you?" Linghu Chong said. "You treat me really well, you know that we

don't want to be apart so you wrapped the two of us husband and wife very tightly just like this. You raised me since I was little and you know my heart really well. In this world, you're my only friend Mr. Yue." He was saying all these smart-aleck comments hoping to drag the time out while looking for some way to get out of this situation. Another hope of his was that Feng Qingyang would suddenly appear to rescue them.

Yue Buqun sneered. "Little traitor, you love to talk nonsense since you were little, and your temperament still haven't changed till now. I should cut off your tongue first to save you from losing your tongue in hell when you die." His left leg flew up and kicked Linghu Chong on his waist, sealing his mute accupoint and shutting Linghu Chong up.

"Young lady Ren," Yue Buqun continued. "Who do you want me to kill first? Him or you?"

"What's the difference?" Yingying replied. "I only have three medicines for the Divine Three Brain Corpse Pill on my body."

Yue Buqun's face changed colour when he heard this. Ever since he was forced by Yingying to swallow the 'Divine Three Brain Corpse' pill, he had been thinking day and night on how to obtain the medicine. He had been waiting for a long time for this opportunity. The two of them had just escaped danger, happily going out of the cave, without taking care to protect themselves when suddenly this metal fish net trapped them. His original idea was to kill Linghu Chong and Yingying first before searching her body for the medicine. But when he heard her saying there was only three medicines on her body, he realised he would only be able to live for three more years after killing them. Moreover, after three years had passed, the insect would enter his brain and make him insane and die in unbearable pain. This matter was really difficult for him to settle. Even though his inner energy and martial art were marvelous, he couldn't stop both of his hands from trembling.

"Alright, let's make a deal," Yue Buqun said. "Tell me how to make the medicine, and I'll spare both your lives."

Yingying laughed and indifferently said, "Even though I'm still young, I know Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue's personality. If your

words are to be believed, then your nickname wouldn't be Gentleman Sword."

"You've learned nothing by being with Linghu Chong," Yue Buqun said. "All you've learned is how to talk a lot. You're not willing to say how to make the medicine?"

"Of course not," Yingying answered. "In three years time, Chong-lang and I will be waiting at death's door to welcome you. At that time, you won't have your five senses anymore and your whole face will be ruined, I wonder if we'll still be able to recognise you."

Yue Buqun felt a wave of coldness at his back. He understood her meaning of 'won't have your five senses and your whole face will be ruined' was a reference to the time when the poison would come out. If his whole body weren't rotten by that time, then he would destroy his own face through madness. His whole body shivered thinking about it.

"Even if my whole face will be ruined, yours will be ruined three years earlier than mine," Yue Buqun indignantly said. "I won't kill you too, I'll only cut off your ears and nose. And on your lovely white snow face, I'm going to give you seventeen eighteen slashes. We'll see then how much love, how much affection, your Chong-lang has. Whether he'll still love a freak ugly weirdo."

With a hiss, he drew his long sword out. Yingying gasped in surprise. She wasn't afraid of death, but if Yue Buqun were to ruin her face to make it look like a demon and let Linghu Chong look at her, it was even worse than death. Even though Linghu Chong's mute acupoint was sealed, he was still able to move his hands and feet. He knew what Yingying was thinking so he bumped her with his elbow, extended two fingers from his right hand and pierced them towards his eyes. Yingying again cried out and she hurriedly called out, "Brother Chong, don't!"

Yue Buqun didn't really mean to ruin Yingying's face. He was only threatening her to make her tell him the prescription for the medicine. If Linghu Chong destroyed both his eyes, then his plan would be useless. His left hand shot out unbelievably quick and grabbed Linghu Chong's right wrist through the fist net.

"Stop!" Yue Buqun shouted.



As their skins connected, Yue Buqun immediately felt his internal energy flowing out.

"Aiyo!" Yue Buqun called out. In a hurry, he tried to get away but it was like his palm was glued to Linghu Chong's wrist. Linghu Chong turned his hand around grabbing Yue Buqun's palm. Yue Buqun now felt his inner energy rushing out even faster. He was greatly startled. With the long sword in his right hand, he quickly chopped it at Linghu Chong's body. Linghu Chong's hand shook and dragged his body back causing the sword to slash at the ground. Yue Buqun's inner energy was still flowing out. As he tried to slash his sword a second time, he felt weak and powerless that he practically couldn't even lift his own arm. Exhorting his energy, he tried to lift his sword. With the sword aiming at the point between Linghu Chong's eyes and his arm and the long sword unceasingly quivering, he slowly pierced it forward.

Yingying was alarmed and she wanted to use her finger to flick Yue Buqun's sword away. But both her arms were pressed under Linghu Chong's body and the fish net was tightly wrapped around her body. She exerted her strength to struggle, but she couldn't free her hands. Linghu Chong's left arm was also being trapped under Yingying's body so he also couldn't use it. He saw the sword point slowly stabbing forward. He thought, "I killed Zuo Lengchan and injured Lin Pingzhi with this kind of slow sword. This time, master is also going to use this method to kill me. What a really quick retribution."

Yue Buqun felt his inner energy was quickly running out, but the sword point was only a few inches away from Linghu Chong's eyebrow. He was both happy and anxious.

"You... What are you doing?" a sharp female voice cried out from behind. "Take your sword away!"

Sound of footsteps was heard as someone drew near. Yue Buqun saw his sword only had to go a few more inches then he'd be able to kill Linghu Chong. At this time, his life was hanging by a thread so how could he agree to just give up? Staking all his remaining energy, his sword finally reached Linghu Chong's forehead.

It was at this time when he suddenly felt something cold at the back of his body. A long sword had been pierced from his back all the way through to the front of his chest.

"Big brother Linghu, are you alright?" a female voice cried out. She was Yilin.

The blood in Linghu Chong's chest was bubbling up and he couldn't reply her.

"Little martial sister, Big Brother Linghu is alright," Yingying told her.

"That's very good!" Yilin happily said. She was suddenly startled and frightenedly cried, "It's Mr. Yue! I... I killed him!"

"That's right," Yingying said. "Congratulations for taking revenge on your master's murderer. Can you untie the fish net please? Let me get out."

"Yes, yes!" Yilin replied. She saw Yue Buqun was prostrated on the ground with blood spouting out from the sword wound. Her whole body turned to jelly and in a quivering voice, she asked, "I... I killed him?" She wanted to grab the rope to release it but both her hands were trembling and she had no power in them. She was unable to release them.

"Little nun," a voice suddenly called out from the left. "You killed the honourable chief. I'll teach you today that you can't run away from justice!"

An old man wearing a yellow gown came forward carrying a naked sword. This person was Lao Denuo.

"Aiyo!" Linghu Chong cried out.

"Little martial sister, quickly use your sword to fight," Yingying shouted.

Yilin was stupefied for a moment before she drew the sword out of Yue Buqun's body. Lao Denuo attacked with three quick strokes and Yilin blocked all three attacks. The third attack flitted near her left shoulder and drew blood. Lao Denuo's sword was getting faster and faster with some of the movements from the Evil Resisting Sword Art. But since he had not learned it too deeply, he only had the movement while his speed was way below that of Lin Pingzhi. Originally, Lao Denuo was already experienced and his sword art came from Songshan and Huashan

Schools. It was only recently that he learned the Evil Resisting Sword Art. So Yilin was originally not his match.

However, as Yihe and Yiqing was hoping that Yilin would become Heng-Shan's headmaster in the future, they had been supervising her practising the Heng-Shan sword art that Linghu Chong gave them. So her martial art had improved. Also, because Lao Denuo's Evil Resisting Sword Art was not yet perfected and he wanted to try it out, their movements came out in between the Songshan and Huashan Schools' sword art that he was using. His sword movements became mixed and caused his original sword art to be weaker.

In the beginning, when Yilin saw the fast sword art from his enemy, she panicked and the third attack injured her left shoulder. But she thought if she lost then Linghu Chong and Yingying would not escape from danger as well and they were bound to meet disaster as well. She was thinking that if he was going to kill Big brother Linghu, then it was better if she was killed first. Without any fear of dying, she didn't think of preserving herself and just kept on attacking with all her moves.

When Lao Denuo was confronted with her staking-life fighting method, he couldn't win against her for the moment. He swore, "Little nun, you \*\*\*\* your mother real good!"

Yingying saw Yilin's spirit was raised and she was fighting with all her might. But after a long time, she was still bound to lose. She rolled on the ground freeing her left arm and unsealing Linghu Chong's acupoint. She put her hand inside her bosom and took out her short sword.

"Lao Denuo," Linghu Chong cried out. "What's that behind you?"

Lao Denuo was an experienced person and he wouldn't fall for Linghu Chong's trick by turning around to have a look and give his enemy an opportunity to attack him. He ignored Linghu Chong and increased the ferocity of his attack. Yingying held her short sword wanting to toss it out from the fish net, but Yilin was fighting very closely with Lao Denuo. If her toss was slightly off then it might hit her. She hesitated and didn't throw her sword out.

Suddenly, Yilin cried out. Her left shoulder had again been hit. The first time she got hit, the injury was very light, but this time the wound was a few inches deep. The grass around the area was splashed with her blood.

"Monkey, monkey, ah, this is sixth brother's monkey," Linghu Chong called out. "Good monkey, quickly bite him. This is the traitor who killed your master."

In order to steal Yue Buqun's 'Violet Twilight Secret Manual', Lao Denuo killed Lu Dayou who was the sixth disciple of Huashan School. Lu Dayou had a small monkey which usually sits on his shoulder. After he died, this monkey had gone somewhere. At this time, he suddenly heard Linghu Chong's shout and couldn't help feeling scared. "If this animal jump on me and bite me then my movements will be restricted." So he leaned to one side and turned around to slash his sword. But how could there be a monkey behind his back? At this time, Yingying tossed her sword towards the back of his neck. Lao Denuo stooped down and the short sword flew above his neck. Suddenly, he felt a rope tightened around his left ankle. The rope was tugged backwards and he fell face forward.

When Linghu Chong saw Lao Denuo stooped down to avoid the sword, it presented a very good opportunity. He quickly undid the rope tying the fish net and sent the rope out coiling around his left ankle and pulled it.

"Kill him, kill him!" Linghu Chong and Yingying called out.

Yilin chopped her sword down on Lao Denuo's neck. But she was a compassionate person and she was also timid. When she first killed Yue Buqun, she did it to save Linghu Chong. With her being anxious, she quickly wielded her sword and didn't realise she was actually going to kill a person. When her sword was about to slash Lao Denuo's neck, her heart became soft. Her sword leaned to a side and slashed his right shoulder instead. Lao Denuo's collarbone was broken and his sword dropped from his hand. He was afraid Yilin's second sword would slash down again so he endured the pain to get up and struggled to be free of the rope. He then escaped down from the cliff.

Suddenly, two people came up from around the mountain. The female shouted, "Hey, was it you who scolded my daughter

just then?" She was Yilin's mother who was at the Hanging Temple pretending to be the mute granny. Lao Denuo did a flying kick to kick her away. That granny leaned to one side to avoid it and gave him a mighty slap on the cheek.

"You scolded her 'you \*\*\*\* your mother real good'," she shouted. "I'm her mother! You dare to scold me?"

"Stop him, stop him!" Linghu Chong cried out. "Don't let him get away!"

That granny originally wanted to hit down on Lao Denuo's head, but hearing Linghu Chong's shouting. She shouted, "Little rascal, I'm going to let him go!" She leaned to one side and gave Lao Denuo a kick on his buttock. Lao Denuo felt like he had received a pardon from heaven as he sprinted down the cliff.

There was a person behind that granny, who was actually Monk No Commandment. He chuckled and said, "What are you playing at? Why are you playing inside the net?"

"Dad," Yilin said. "Undo the fish net, let Big brother Linghu and Young lady Ren out."

"I haven't settled my debt with this little bastard yet," that granny said with a calm face. "You can't let him go!"

Linghu Chong laughed loudly then shouted, "Once the couple gets together, you throw the matchmaker out. You husband and wife already has a reunion now, why aren't you thanking the matchmaker?"

That granny gave him a kick and shouted, "I thank you with a kick!"

"Peach Valley Six Fairies," Linghu Chong laughingly called out. "Quickly help me!"

That granny was very afraid of the Peach Valley Six Fairies so she quickly turned her head around. Linghu Chong hastily extended his hand out of the fish net and undid the knot and let Yingying out. But he had not managed to go out yet when that granny shouted, "You can't go out!"

"If I can't get out then I'll stay in here," Linghu Chong laughingly replied. "Inside this fish net, there's no difference between heaven and earth. A gentleman can bend and straighten. Bend to enter the net and straighten to get out of the net. What to do? I, Linghu Chong, ..." As he was spouting

nonsense, his eyes caught sight of Yue Buqun's body prostrated on the ground. The smile on his face disappeared and it was suddenly replaced with tears in his eyes. His tears flowed down his cheeks.

That granny was still angry as she shouted, "Little bastard! If I don't beat you up till you're black and blue then I won't be satisfied!" Her left palm shot out wanting to slap Linghu Chong's right cheek.

"Mom!" Yilin cried out. "Don't... don't..."

Linghu Chong raised his right hand and he was already holding a long sword. Actually, when he was lost in thought looking at Yue Buqun's corpse, Yingying put the sword in his hand. He pointed his sword and stabbed it at that granny's right shoulder's acupoint forcing her to retreat a step. That granny got even angrier. Her body moved like the wind, her palm hacking, her elbow striking, her leg sweeping. In just a short time, she had attacked with seven to eight moves. Linghu Chong was still inside the fish net and he just pointed his sword as he wished. Each stab was aimed at that granny's fatal acupoint. But every time the sword point was about to reach her body, he immediately withdrew it. This 'Dugu Nine Sword' was unmatched in this world. If Linghu Chong wasn't giving way then that granny would've died seven to eight times already. After several more moves, that granny knew his martial art was much too high compared to hers. With a long sigh, she stopped attacking and she looked very upset.

"Dear," Monk No Commandment pleaded. "We're all good friends, why do you need to be angry for?"

"Who asked you to speak?" that granny angrily replied. There was no one to vent her anger to so she turned to him.

Linghu Chong put his sword down and came out of the fish net. "You want to hit me to vent your anger, I'll let you do it!" Linghu Chong laughingly said.

That granny raised her palm and slapped him heavily. Linghu Chong cried out as he didn't dodge the hit.

"Why didn't you dodge?" that granny angrily asked.

"I can't dodge it," Linghu Chong replied. "How do I do that?"

That granny spat. She knew in her heart he was considering Yilin so he let her hit him. Her left palm was already raised but she didn't hit him.

Yingying pulled on Yilin's hand and said, "Little martial sister, lucky you came here to rescue us. How did you come here?"

"I was with the other martial sister," Yilin narrated. "We were all (she pointed at Yue Buqun's corpse) .... captured by his people. Me and three other martial sisters were being locked up in a cave. Just then, dad and mom rescued me. Dad, mom and I, also Cannot Have No Commandment and three martial sisters, we all separately went around rescuing the other martial sisters. I was walking below the cliff when I heard people talking on top. The voice sounded like Big brother Linghu's so I quickly went up to have a look."

"He and I went around everywhere but we didn't find anyone," Yingying said. "So you were actually being held inside a cave."

"Just then that old bastard wearing the yellow gown is a bad person," Linghu Chong said. "You let him go but I can't accept that." He picked up a long sword from the ground and said, "Let's chase after him."

The party of five went down the Cliff of Repentance. They had not walked for too long when they saw Tian Boguang with seven Heng-Shan disciples climbing out of a valley. Yiqing was one of them. They were really happy to meet each other.

Linghu Chong thought, "There's no one in this world who knows the surroundings in Huashan better than me. I didn't know there was another cave below that valley, but Tian Boguang is an outsider and he knows of it. How strange?" He pulled on Tian Boguang's sleeve and the two of them walked behind the party.

"Brother Tian," Linghu Chong said. "There's another cave below that valley. I didn't know about it before but you knew about it. I really admire you."

Tian Boguang smiled. "There's nothing strange about it."

"Ah, that's right," Linghu Chong said. "You must've captured a Huashan disciple and interrogated him."

"I didn't," Tian Boguang replied.

"Then how did you find out? Can you tell me?" Linghu Chong asked.

Tian Boguang blushed and smiled. "This matter is not comfortable to talk about. It's better not to speak of it."

Linghu Chong was even more curious and he just had to ask about it. "You and I are loafers in Jianghu, what's there that's so uncomfortable to talk about?" Linghu Chong said. "Quickly say it."

"After I say it," Tian Boguang pleaded. "Headmaster Linghu, please don't blame me."

"You've rescued many martial sisters from Heng-Shan School and I haven't thanked you for this yet," Linghu Chong replied. "So how can I blame you?"

Tian Boguang lowered his voice and said, "I'll tell you. Before I had a really bad temperament and you already know about this. Ever since Grand martial master shaved my head and made me take the Buddhist name 'Cannot Have No Commandment', I cannot do that again..."

Linghu Chong thought the way Monk No Commandment reprimanded him was really weird and his mouth showed a slight smile. Tian Boguang knew what he was thinking of and his face turned red. He continued, "But I've never forgotten the skills I've learned from earlier. No matter how far I'm separated by, as long as there are women there, I... I can feel them."

Linghu Chong was perplexed, he asked, "How do you do that?"

"I also don't know," Tian Boguang replied. "I think I can smell women, they're different than men's smell."

Linghu Chong laughed aloud. "It's said that some reverend monks can have divine eyes or divine ears. Brother Tian unexpectedly has this 'divine nose'."

"I'm ashamed, ashamed!"

"Brother Tian's skill was originally used to do bad things," Linghu Chong said. "After undergoing some experience, I never thought that today you'd use this skill to save my Heng-Shan School's disciples."

Yingying turned her head around to ask what was so funny. But looking at Tian Boguang's face, she guessed it was



something inappropriate and she quickly shut her mouth.

Tian Boguang suddenly stopped. "There seems to be some Heng-Shan School's disciples on the left." He sniffed around a few times then went towards the underbrush below the hill. Lowering his head, he searched around for a while. He exclaimed happily and pointed to the ground. "Here!" he cried out. There was a pile of more than ten big rocks on the place that he had pointed out. Each of these rocks were around two to three hundred catties. He immediately removed a rock away.

No Commandment and Linghu Chong went over to help. After a while they had removed more than ten big rocks, and there was a green slab underneath. The three of them worked together to lift the slab up. It revealed a cave underneath and there were a few nuns lying underneath. They were all disciples of Heng-Shan School. Yiqing and Yimin quickly jumped down the cave and helped their martial sisters to go up. After helping a few to go up, there were still more inside, each one was gasping for air. They quickly pulled the imprisoned Heng-Shan disciple up. Yihe, Zheng E, and Qin Juan were among them. There were more than thirty people inside this cave. If they weren't rescued in the next one or two days, they would have all died.

Linghu Chong thought how his master was so violent, he couldn't help being disappointed with him.

"Brother Tian, this skill of yours isn't a small thing," Linghu Chong praised him. "These martial sisters were deeply buried underneath but you can still smell them out. Really admirable."

"There's nothing strange about it," Tian Boguan replied. "Luckily, there are many martial uncles from the secular world in there..."

"Martial uncles? Ah, that's right, you're Yilin's disciple."

"If the ones imprisoned here were all Buddhist martial uncles, then I wouldn't have been able to find them," Tian Boguang continued.

"There's a difference between secular and Buddhist people?"

"Of course. Secular female would have this powder fragrance on them," Tian Boguang explained. Linghu Chong was enlightened.

They quickly tried to rescue them. Yiqing and Yilin were using their caps to scoop water in them to give them drink. Luckily, there was a crack in that cave that allowed air to go in and Heng-Shan School's disciples all had learned inner energy. Even though they were extremely distressed, they still had their lives. Yihe had the deepest inner energy so after drinking some water, she was the first one to recover.

"We've only rescued less than a third," Linghu Chong said. "Brother Tian, I have to ask you to use your divine power to help us search for them."

That granny stared at Tian Boguang, her face looked really suspicious. "How did you know they were imprisoned here?" she asked. "You were probably here when they were being imprisoned, am I right?"

"No, no!" Tian Boguang quickly replied. "I've been following grand martial master. I've never left his side."

That granny's face sunk as she shouted, "You've always been with him?"

Tian Boguang mumbled indistinctly. He knew they just had a reunion after a long break up. Along the way they had been crying, laughing, fighting, being romantic, and he had heard all of these. This grand master-wife of his could turn angry from shyness and if that happened, it would be very troublesome. He quickly said, "For the last half a year, I've been following grand martial master. About ten days ago, we parted ways. We just met again today at Huashan."

That granny was half believing and half doubting him. She asked, "Then how did you know these nuns were being locked up inside this cave?"

"This... this..." Tian Boguang mumbled. He didn't know how to phrase it nicely and was feeling very embarrassed. After some time, they suddenly heard the sound of more than ten horns coming from the mountainside, followed by the sound of drums. It sounded like an army of ten thousand soldiers and a thousand horses had come.

They were all startled. Yingying whispered on Linghu Chong's ear, "It's my dad!"

"Oh!" Linghu Chong realised and he wanted to say, "So it's my father-in-law." But he felt it was inappropriate so he didn't say it out loud. The drums thundered for a while, then the horns rang again.

"Has an army come?" that granny asked.

Suddenly, both the drums and horns stopped. Seven to eight people shouted, "Sun Moon Divine Sect's cultured and esteemed martial artist, benefactors of the common people, Chief Ren has arrived!" These seven to eight people had very deep internal energies so their shout reverberated throughout the mountain and echoes could be heard, "Chief Ren has arrived! Chief Ren has arrived!"

The power of these cries intimidated them and the colour on Monk No Commandment's face and the others changed. The echoes had not finished yet when they heard countless number of voices crying out, "Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu! Chief Ren flourishes the Divine Sect, long live to Chief!"

Hearing their voices, there were at least two to three thousands of them. The echo was again heard from everywhere, "Chief Ren flourishes the Divine Sect, long live to Chief! Chief Ren flourishes the Divine Sect, long live to Chief!" After some time, the whole place became quiet. Then someone with a clear voice said, "Sun Moon Divine Sect's cultured and esteemed martial artist, benefactors of the common people, Chief Ren has an order: Five mountains sword schools' headmasters and all the disciples in the schools hear this: Everyone will meet at the steps of the Peak of Morning Sun."

He spoke three times in his clear voice. After stopping for a while, he continued, "Fragrant masters and their deputies of the twelve halls, lead the sect's disciples to check all the hills and guard the important paths! Don't let people walk around! Anyone who doesn't obey this order will be killed!" Around twenty to thirty people immediately acknowledged this order.

Linghu Chong and Yingying shared a look and they understood what was going on. That person said to check all the hills and to guard the important paths to force the disciples of the five mountains sword schools to go towards the Peak of Morning Sun to meet with Chief Ren. Linghu Chong thought,

"He's Yingying's father. I'm going to marry Yingying soon so I should go see Chief Ren."

He told Yihe and the rest of the people, "We still have a lot of martial sisters who are still imprisoned. Brother Tian, please lead the way to save them as soon as possible. Chief Ren is young lady Ren's father so he wouldn't give us any trouble. Young lady Ren and I are going to the east peak first. Martial sisters, you can follow later and we'll meet up there on the east peak." Yihe, Yiqing, Yilin and the others acknowledged the order and followed Tian Boguang to save their martial sisters.

"What is he relying on barking orders here?" that granny angrily said. "I'm not going to see him. I want to see how this Ren is going to kill me."

Linghu Chong knew she was very stubborn and was hard to persuade. If she were to meet Ren Woxing, her speech would most likely offend him and things would turn out really bad. He immediately took his leave from Monk No Commandment and his wife, then went to the east peak with Yingying.

"The three highest peaks in Huashan are the east peak, south peak, and west peak. The east and west peaks are particularly tall," Linghu Chong said. "The real name of the east peak is the Peak of Morning Sun. Your father chose this peak to meet with the disciples of the Five Mountains Sword School to make it look like that we are coming to pay respect to an imperial court. Your father said all the people of the Five Mountains Sword School to go to the Peak of Morning Sun. Could it be that all the people from all the schools are at Huashan?"

"In the five mountains sword schools, Mr. Yue, Zuo Lengchan, and Mr. Mo Da have all passed away today. I don't know who Taishan School has appointed as their headmaster. In this alliance of five big sword schools, you're the only headmaster left," Yingying said.

"Besides Heng-Shan School, most of the heroes from the five schools have all died inside the cave on that Cliff of Contemplation. Besides, the disciples of Heng-Shan Schools have all been captured and are in distress, I'm afraid..."

"You're afraid my father will take advantage of this to eliminate the five mountains sword schools?"

Linghu Chong nodded his head and let out a sigh. "Actually, he doesn't need to do anything. There's not many people left in the five mountains sword schools."

Yingying also let out a sigh. "Mr. Yue deceived the masters from the five mountains sword schools. He enticed them to look at the sword moves engraved at Huashan with the intention of wiping out all the warriors with good martial art. That way his position as the headmaster of the Five Mountains School would be safe and no one from each of the schools would be able to go against him. This move was originally very clever, but Zuo Lengchan unexpectedly got a whiff of this and took those blind men to kill him inside that dark cave."

"You're saying Zuo Lengchan wanted to kill my master?" Linghu Chong queried. "He wasn't trying to kill me?"

"He didn't know you were going to come," Yingying answered. "Your swordplay is brilliant and you already knew of the moves engraved on the cave wall a long time ago, so you wouldn't have gone inside to take a look at those sword moves. When we went in there, it was just a coincidence."

"What you said is right," Linghu Chong agreed. "Actually, Zuo Lengchan and I had no enmity. Both of his eyes were blinded by my master, and the headmaster position of the Five Mountains School was also snatched by him. Those things would be really cutting to him."

"Zuo Lengchan probably had a strategy prepared," Yingying said. "He'd tempt Mr. Yue to go inside the cave and then take advantage of the darkness to kill him. I don't know how, but this plan was discovered by Mr. Yue and instead of going in, he guarded the cave's entrance and captured people using the fish net. This is really the mantis seizing the cicada not knowing the oriole was just behind<sup>10</sup>. Now, Zuo Lengchan and your master have both died while the reason for all these would never be known."

Linghu Chong mournfully nodded his head.

"Mr. Yue deceived the masters of the five mountains sword schools to come here," Yingying continued. "There must've been a foreshadowing of this matter a long time ago. That day at Songshan during the fight for the leadership, your little martial

sister used Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, and Heng-Shan brilliant sword moves. The masters from all four schools witnessed all these and their hearts would itch in getting to know them. Only the disciples from Heng-Shan School had been taught the sword moves from the cave wall by you, so they wouldn't find them extraordinary. While the disciples from Taishan, Hengshan, and Songshan Schools would of course be asking where Miss Yue got these sword moves from. Mr. Yue secretly spread the rumour and decided on a date that the cave would be open to them. The masters from these three schools, wouldn't they rush to be here?"

"For people who study martial art like us," Linghu Chong said. "Once we hear of a place to learn some brilliant martial art, then we'd definitely brave danger and death to go there. Especially when those martial arts are from our own school, we wouldn't rest until we've seen them. That's why people like martial uncle Mo Da and other master-hands all died inside that cave."

"Mr. Yue anticipated that your Heng-Shan School wouldn't come, so he prepared another plan," Yingying said. "He used the confusion poison to knock everyone out and took them up to Huashan."

"I don't understand why master would spend such a big effort to bring my disciples up to Huashan?" Linghu Chong questioned. "This matter would be easily discovered since they have to go through such a long journey. Why didn't he just kill all of them at Heng-Shan? Wouldn't this be easier?" He stopped for a tick then continued, "Ah, I understand. If he killed all the Heng-Shan disciples then there'll be one less mountain from the Five Mountains School. Master wants to be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, but without Heng-Shan School, he couldn't be the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. The name simply wouldn't be right."

"That's one reason," Yingying said. "But I think, there's still one more reason."

"What's that?"

"The best thing would of course be to capture you," Yingying explained. "Then he'd trade with something of mine."

Linghu Chong was enlightened and he excitedly hit his thigh. "That's right. My master wanted the medicine for the Three Corpse Brain Pill."

"After Mr. Yue was forced to take this pill, he would've been restless day and night wanting to get a medicine for it," Yingying said. "One day he wouldn't accept it and the next he'd be worried to death. He knew that he could only get the medicine by getting you."

"Of course, I'm your darling," Linghu Chong agreed. "Only by using me that he can exchange the medicine from you."

Yingying pursed her lip. "If he was going to use you to trade for the medicine then I wouldn't trade. The materials for the medicine are so hard to get and making them isn't easy either. So they're priceless treasure. How could I trade them so easily?"

"The common saying goes: It's easy to find priceless treasure, hard to find a lover."

Yingying's whole cheeks turned bright red immediately. In a whisper, she said, "Like a mouse getting on a scale, scaling and praising himself. Know no shame."

As they talked, they arrived at a narrow path. This mountain path was perfectly straight as it went up and it was also very steep. They couldn't walk side by side through this path.

"You go first," Yingying said.

"You go first," Linghu Chong said. "If you fall down then I'll grab you."

"No, you go first, but you're not allowed to turn your head back to look at me. You must listen to what granny tells you to do." She laughed when she finished talking.

"Fine, I go first," Linghu Chong relented. "If I fall down, you can grab me."

"That won't do, that won't do!" Yingying hastily replied. She was afraid he would pretend to misstep to play around with her. So she quickly went up the mountain path first.

Even though Yingying saw him making a joke, his expression was still melancholic. After he laughed, he turned mournful again. She knew it was difficult for him to forget about Yue Buqun's death. Along the way she'd tried to make him say some jokes to make him forget about his worries. After a few turns, they

arrived at the top of the Jade Maiden Peak. Linghu Chong pointed out to her which one was the Jade Maiden's face washing basin and which one was the Jade Maiden's dressing table. Yingying knew this Jade Maiden Peak was the place he used to play around with Yue Lingshan back then, and she was afraid that he might get even more upset, so she just took a quick glance without asking anything.

After going down a slope, they went up a little path towards the Peak of Morning Sun. They saw guards everywhere around the mountain. The Sun Moon Sect's men were dressed in seven different gown colour and they were very discipline in following the flag going back and forth. Compared to the last time he visited the Dark Wood Cliff, there was a different feeling of dread.

Linghu Chong secretly praised, "Chief Ren is a very learned man. That day when I led thousands of men to attack Shaolin Temple, it was a mess, everything was chaotic. How can it be compared to the Sun Moon Sect's army which resembles a body using its arms, like when an arm wants to point at something, with thousands of people resembling one person? Dongfang Bubai is also one great person. It was only later that he made a mistake and gave the handling of sect's matter to Yang Lianting. That's when the Dark Wood Cliff withered and its power diminished."

The people of Sun Moon Sect respectfully bowed their bodies when they saw Yingying. They were also very respectful towards Linghu Chong. The bannermen roared one by one from the bottom of the peak all the way to the peak, announcing to Ren Woxing their arrivals. Linghu Chong saw all the important places between the bottom of the peak to the peak were all packed with people from the sect. There were at least two thousands guards around those places. It seemed that this time the Sun Moon Sect had gathered many warriors from the unorthodox path to help them in carrying out this massive operation. If all the headmasters from the five mountains sword schools were still alive, and all the master-hands from the five schools were at Huashan, and they had also been deployed before hand to meet this attack, it was still likely that they would lose. At this time



with the number of talented fighter close to zero, it was impossible for them to fight back.

Looking at the situation now, it was certain that Ren Woxing had a harmful idea towards the five mountains sword schools. Since things had come to this, there was nothing he could've done and now everything was up to the Heaven's will. He could only take things step by step. If Ren Woxing wanted to annihilate the five mountains sword schools, then he couldn't just stay on the side preserving his own life. He would have to fight to the death and Heng-Shan School's disciples would all be killed on top of this Peak of Morning Sun.

Although he was clever, he wasn't that experienced and didn't have a plan in mind to face this calamity. When he saw all the disciples of Heng-Shan School fell into the trap, he also didn't know how to free them and everything was just left to fate and circumstances. He was also thinking that Yingying and Chief Ren were related by flesh and blood so the most she would do would be not to help both sides. So there was no chance she would help him by thinking of a plan to go against her own father. At this time, facing the sect's disciples at the Peak of Morning Sun with bows drawn and sabres unsheathed, he didn't even look at them and he instead told Yingying some jokes.

But Yingying was already tied in knots in worry, so she couldn't be like Linghu Chong who was unworried. Along the way, she'd been churning her brain thinking on what to do. She pondered, "Chong-lang is a fearless person. Even if the sky collapsed, he'd only notice it when it's right on top of him. I've always thought of a way for him to do." Thinking that her father had led such a big operation here, it couldn't be anything good. When the situation turned dangerous, then all she could do would be to adapt since there was no other good option.

The two of them slowly went up to the peak. When they reached the summit, they were suddenly assaulted with horns blaring followed by sound of music from drums and pipes. This was unexpectedly the welcoming of honoured guests.

Linghu Chong whispered, "Father-in-law is welcoming the son-in-law back home!"

Yingying blankly stared at him and she felt really anxious. She thought, "This person really doesn't worry about anything. At this time, he can still joke around."

Then she heard a person laughed loudly and in a clear voice said, "Young lady, Brother Linghu, Chief's been waiting for you for a long time."

A slim elder wearing a purple gown took a step forward and gripped both of Linghu Chong's hands. His face was full of happiness. He was Xiang Wentian. When Linghu Chong saw him, he was also very happy. "Brother Xiang," Linghu Chong called out. "You're well, I've thought of you often."

"At Dark Wood Cliff, I keep hearing news of your prestige soaring in Wulin," Xiang Wentian laughingly replied. "I drank to you from far away, I've at least drunk more than ten big pots of wine. Quickly go see Chief." Taking his hand, he went towards a stone structure several stories high.

That stone structure was on top of the east peak. It was extremely big and tall, just like it had been naturally formed. To the east of that structure was Peak of the Morning Sun's highest place which was called Deity's Palm. That Deity's Palm had five big pillars rising to the sky with the central pillar being the highest. They saw a big chair placed underneath the central pillar, and a person sat in it. This person was Ren Woxing.

Yingying walked to the front of the palm, looked up and called out, "Daddy!"

Linghu Chong bowed and said, "Junior Linghu Chong pays my respect to Chief."

Ren Woxing laughed aloud. "Little brother, you come at the right time. We're all family, there's no need to be so formal. Today, our sect will meet with the world's heroes so we shall talk business first before talking about family matter. My worthy... worthy brother, sit beside me."

Linghu Chong heard him paused after saying this word 'worthy' seemingly like he wanted to say 'worthy son-in-law'. But since it had not been decided yet, he corrected himself from calling him 'worthy son-in-law'. It looked like he had already approved of the marriage between Yingying and him. He also said 'We're all family' and 'we shall talk business first before

talking about family matter', it was obvious Ren Woxing had regarded him as family. He felt happy and straighten his body up.

Suddenly, a cold energy rushed up from this 'Dantian' region and he felt like he had entered an icehouse. His body trembled and continuously shook. Yingying was started and quickly went up to him. "What's wrong?"

"I... I..." Linghu Chong stammered out but he unexpectedly couldn't utter another word.

Even though Ren Woxing was high up there, his eyesight was still sharp. "Did you clash palms with Zuo Lengchan?"

Linghu Chong nodded.

Ren Woxing smiled. "It's nothing. You sucked his polar ice energy, once you scatter it out, it'll be alright. Why isn't Zuo Lengchan coming here?"

"Zuo Lengchan secretly set up a violent plan to kill Big Brother Linghu and me," Yingying told him. "Big Brother Linghu killed him."

"Oh!" Ren Woxing uttered. He was sitting very high up so they couldn't see his face. But in this voice, there was an air of disappointment.

Yingying understood her father's heart. Today, he had come in a grand manner to intimidate the five mountains sword schools and to suppress the people of the five schools. Zuo Lengchan was his big enemy and now he wouldn't be able to see him bend his knee and lower his head in front of him so it was unavoidable that he would feel regret. She extended her left hand to hold Linghu Chong's right hand to help him disperse the cold energy. Linghu Chong's left hand was being held by Xiang Wentian. Together, they moved their energy. Linghu Chong gradually felt the coldness in his body disappeared.

That day, when Ren Woxing and Zuo Lengchan fought at the Shaolin Temple, he absorbed his polar ice energy and turned into snowman in the middle of the snow field along with Linghu Chong, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying. But this time, Linghu Chong had only clashed swords with him and was only exposed to Zuo Lengchan's cold energy for a short time. Moreover, he didn't try to absorb it himself so only a little amount of cold

energy was absorbed by him. A short time later, he wasn't trembling anymore.

"I'm alright, thank you!" Linghu Chong said.

"Little brother," Ren Woxing said. "You heard my call and came up the peak to see me. Very good, very good!" He then turned his head towards Xiang Wentian and said, "Why haven't the people from the other four schools arrived yet?"

"Subordinate will call them again!" Xiang Wentian replied. He waved his left hand, and eight old men in yellow gown lined up immediately in front of the peak. They called out together, "Sun Moon Divine Sect's cultured and esteemed martial artist, benefactors of the common people, Chief Ren has an order: Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, and Songshan Schools, everyone must quickly come to Peak of the Morning Sun for a meeting. Each hall's fragrant master, ask them to come up quickly and not to delay."

These eight old men were all masters with deep internal energies. When they combined their voices together, they went very far and were able to be heard from all the peaks. Then they heard from all four directions, there were people answering, "As ordered. Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu!" These were the replies from the Sun Moon Sect's fragrant masters.

"Headmaster Linghu, please take a seat beside me," a smiling Ren Woxing said.

Linghu Chong saw five chairs arranged on the west side of the deity's palm. Each chair was draped with a brocade of the colours black, white, blue-green, red, and yellow. While a mountain peak was embroidered on each brocade. North Heng-Shan was black, and on the black satin was Xianxing Peak embroidered with white thread. He saw the embroidering was attractive and with only a layer of it covering the chair, it had shown how meticulous the Sun Moon Sect had arranged this.

In the five mountains schools, Songshan was the leader while north Heng-Shan was last in standing. But in this seat arrangement, the order had been reversed. The seat of Heng-Shan's headmaster was at the head, followed by west mountain Huashan, while Songshan School was last. It was Ren Woxing who had lifted his position to intentionally humiliate Zuo

Lengchan. But since Zuo Lengchan, Yue Buqun, Mr. Mo Da, and Priest Tianmen had all passed away, Linghu Chong didn't try to decline. He bowed and said, "I'll take a seat!" and went to sit on the chair with the black satin draped on it.

The people at the Peak of the Morning Sun were silently waiting. After a long time, Xiang Wentian again commanded those eight old men to call out again but they still didn't see anyone coming up.

"These people don't know how to appreciate favours," Xiang Wentian said. "They're so late in meeting Chief. Call our people to come up first!"

The eight yellow gowned old men called out, "Five lakes four oceans, every island, every cave, every clan, every stronghold, every mountain, every hall, Brothers, come up to the Peak of Morning Sun to meet Chief!"

When the word 'Chief' had just been uttered, the mountain peak was drowned by people crying out, "As ordered!" Their cries shook the valley. Linghu Chong couldn't help being startled. Hearing this voice, there were at least two to three hundred of them. These people secretly hid themselves and had guessed Ren Woxing's intention. He had wanted to wait for the people of the five mountains sword schools to arrive first before these thousands of people called out in order to startle and intimidate the five mountains sword schools so they wouldn't dare to resist. All of a sudden, people from all directions came out around the Peak of Morning Sun. Although there were a lot of them, they didn't make any noise at all. Every person stood separately at their places. It seemed that they had practised this before hand.

There were around two to three thousands people who had come up the peak. They were all people from the unorthodox path. The rest of the sect's subordinate were still waiting around the side of the peak.

Linghu Chong swept his eyes and saw Blue Phoenix, Zu Qianqiu, Old Man, and Ji Wushi among them. These people had perhaps been controlled by the Sun Moon Sect, or perhaps they had always been communicating. That day when Linghu Chong led the heroes to attack Shaolin Temple, these people also took part. They looked at Linghu Chong and were all smiling, but none

of them called out. Besides the sound of footsteps shuffling, no other sound was heard from these thousands of people on top of this peak. Xiang Wentian raised his right hand and drew a circle in the air. The thousands of people simultaneously kneeled down and simultaneously said, "Jianghu's juniors pay our respect to Sun Moon Sect's cultured and esteemed martial artist, benefactors of the common people, Sacred Chief! Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu!"

These people were all warriors with high martial arts and they were using their energy to call out. One person was like ten people's voices. When they said 'Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu', all the Sun Moon Sect's people around the mountain also joined in. The sound was really shaking the sky and earth.

Ren Woxing majestically sat without moving. He waited for the cries to finish before he lifted his hand. "Everyone has worked hard. Rise!"

"Thank you, Sacred Chief!" the thousands of people said together and they stood up at the same time.

Linghu Chong thought, "That time when I went up the Dark Wood Cliff, I saw the people in the sect shamelessly flattering Dongfang Bubai that I wanted to vomit just observing them. I never thought when Ren Woxing became chief, the situation becomes even worse. They've now added that 'Sacred' word in front of his title making him Sacred Chief. I don't think even the hundreds of scholars and warrior officials would debase themselves in such a fashion when they go to see the current emperor and praise him with 'Long live to Emperor'. I'm a person who studies martial art. If I acted like this insultingly towards other heroes and people, can I still be called a man, a gentleman?" When he thought till here, his qi suddenly rushed up. Suddenly, he felt pain in his 'Dantian' region, his vision darkened, and he felt dizzy.

Both of his hands gripped the chair's arms tightly. His teeth bit on his lower lip until blood seeped out. He knew that after he learned the 'Art of Essence Absorbing', he had sworn off never to use it. But when he was trapped by Yue Buqun inside that fish net outside the cave, his life was hanging by a thread and he was

forced to use this demonical method to absorb Yue Buqun's inner energy. By doing this, he had actually done great harm to himself.

He forcefully restrained himself to not groan aloud. But his body was trembling and his whole face was full of perspiration and distorted. The pain he was in was shown clearly in his expression. Everyone was able to see this clearly. Zu Qianqiu and the others were all looking at him, feeling very concerned.

Yingying walked behind him and whispered, "Brother Chong, I'm here."

Under the watchful eyes of thousands of people, she could only say this before her face turned bright red. Linghu Chong turned his head around to take a look at her, and he felt somewhat better. He immediately thought of the words Ren Woxing said that day at Hangzhou. Ren Woxing said after he had learned this 'Art of Essence Absorbing', he'd get different types of internal energy inside his body and there would come a day when he had to scatter them out. Once he had scattered them, the fierceness would increase by one fold. All those years ago, Ren Woxing gave up his position of chief to Dongfang Bubai also because of these different types of internal energies inside his own body. He always thought on how to solve this problem that he couldn't think of anything else and was taken advantage of by Dongfang Bubai. Ren Woxing was then imprisoned under the West Lake for more than ten years where he finally discovered how to solve this problem. But he wanted Linghu Chong to join the Sun Moon Sect first before he would teach him this method.

At that time, Linghu Chong was unyielding in his thinking that had been ingrained in his mind since he was small. That the demonical and the orthodox couldn't co-exist and that he could never join the Devil Sect. Later on, he saw Zuo Lengchan who was a big master of the orthodox path being deceitful and violent, and his action not differing too much when compared to the Devil Sect. Thus, the line between the orthodox and demonical wasn't that clear anymore. Sometimes, he also thought that if Ren Woxing was determined to make him join the sect then only if he agreed to marry Yingying off to him would he just join the sect without care. His nature was easygoing and he

didn't take anything seriously. It didn't worry him whether he joined the sect or not, it wasn't a big deal for him. But that day on the Dark Wood Cliff, when he saw the heroes being so humble towards Dongfang Bubai and Ren Woxing and with them speaking so flatteringly and insincerely, he couldn't help feeling a strong dislike against the sect instead. He was thinking that if he joined the sect, then he must also spend his days like a slave and he'd become a useless person. Every person has his own fate in living and dying, if he was required to beg to keep his life then Linghu Chong would never do it.

Now, he had further seen Ren Woxing abused his power and arranged everything like he was better than an emperor. He thought of the day when Ren Woxing was back in the dark prison underneath the West Lake, how there was no scenery in there at all. But today, he insulted the world's heroes like they were not people at all. At this time, he suddenly heard someone said in a clear voice, "Reporting to Sacred Chief, Heng-Shan School's disciples have arrived."

Linghu Chong was startled. He saw Yihe, Yiqing, Yilin, and the rest of the Heng-Shan disciples helping each other to go up the peak. Monk No Commandment, his wife, and Tian Boguang were walking behind them.

"Friends," Bao Dachu said in a loud voice. "Please go and see Sacred Chief."

Yiqing and the rest of the disciples saw Linghu Chong sitting on the side. They knew Ren Woxing was his father-in-law, so even though they felt the orthodox and demonical shouldn't be together, on account of their headmaster, they paid their respects as juniors. Walking to the front of the Deity's Palm, they bowed to pay their respect. "Heng-Shan School's junior disciples pay our respects to Chief Ren!"

"Kneel and kowtow!" Bao Dachu ordered.

"We're Buddhist," Yiqing replied in a loud voice. "We worship Buddha, worship Boddhisatva, worship master, we don't worship ordinary people!"

"Sacred Chief isn't an ordinary person," Bao Dachu shouted. "He's a divine deity just like Buddha and Boddhisatva!"



Yiqing turned her head to look at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong shook his head.

"If you want to kill us then kill us!" Yiqing replied. "Disciples of Heng-Shan do not worship ordinary people!"

"Well said, well said!" Monk No Commandment said as he laughed aloud.

"Which school are you from?" Xiang Wentian indignantly questioned. "Where do you come from?"

He saw Heng-Shan School's disciples weren't willing to kowtow to Ren Woxing and the situation was now at a deadlock. If they troubled the female disciples then it wouldn't be good in front of Linghu Chong. So he immediately turned to Monk No Commandment to divide Ren Woxing's attention and make him forget of the kowtow incident.

"Big temples don't want to take me in, while little temples don't want such a wild monk, so I have no family or school," Monk No Commandment laughingly replied. "I heard there'll be lots of people gathering here so I came here to take a look and join in the revelry."

"Today, the Divine Sun Moon Sect is here to meet the five mountains sword schools," Xiang Wentian said. "Other people aren't allowed to be here. Go down the mountain!"

Xiang Wentian said this politely because he was taking into account Linghu Chong's face. He saw Monk No Commandment had come up together with the Heng-Shan School's female disciples so he expected him to be related to the Heng-Shan School. Thus, he didn't want to make things too difficult for him.

"This Mount Huashan doesn't belong to your Devil Sect," said a smiling No Commandment. "If I want to be here then I'll be here, if I want to go then I'll go. Besides the Huashan School's disciples, who dares to tell me what to do?"

These words 'Devil Sect' were a very big taboo in the Sun Moon Sect. Even though the people in Wulin often used the word 'Devil Sect' behind their backs, they'd never blatantly speak these words to their faces. Monk No Commandment was a very frank person who spoke his mind and there was nothing he was afraid of saying. When he heard Xiang Wentian telling him to go down the mountain, he was displeased and didn't even care how

many people the enemy had, and unexpectedly didn't show any fear.

Xiang Wentian turned to Linghu Chong and said, "Brother Linghu, what's the relationship between your honourable school and this crazy monk?"

Linghu Chong's chest and stomach were in great pain so he tremblingly replied, "This... this is Great Master No Commandment..."

Ren Woxing was extremely angry to have heard No Commandment addressed them as the 'Devil Sect'. He was afraid Linghu Chong might say that this monk was deeply connected to him and then they wouldn't be able to kill him. Without waiting for Linghu Chong to finish, he immediately shouted, "Kill this crazy monk!"

"As ordered!" eight elders in yellow gown acknowledged. They cupped their fists and attacked No Commandment immediately after.

"You're relying on many people?" No Commandment shouted. He only said a few words and the attacks from these eight elders had arrived.

"How shameless!" that granny scolded.

She leapt in the crowd, got behind Monk No Commandment's back, and used her palms to fight with the enemies. These eight elders were Sun Moon Sect's number one experts, and their martial arts were about similar to that of No Commandment and that granny. Moreover, with eight against two, they soon got the upper hand. Tian Boguang pulled out his knife and Yilin raised her long sword to enter the fight. Both of their martial arts were far below theirs, and two of the eight elders separated to fight them. Tian Boguang fought with his fast knife chops and he was able to hold up. But Yilin was already pressed by her enemy until she was gasping for air. If it wasn't for the fact that the elder saw her wearing Heng-Shan School's uniform, and that he was giving way to her on Linghu Chong's account, she would've been killed.

Linghu Chong stooped down and pressed his left hand to his stomach. His right hand pulled his long sword out and called out, "Stop... stop!" Rushing into the fight with his long sword trembling, he executed eight moves to force four elders to move

back. He turned around and executed another eight moves. These sixteen moves were from the 'Dugu Nine Sword Art' and each move was aimed at an elder's fatal point. The eight elders were forced back and they didn't dare to fight with him for real so they all stepped back.

Linghu Chong crouched on the ground and said, "Chief... Chief Ren, on my account, please... please let them..." But he couldn't utter the last word 'go'.

Ren Woxing saw his situation and guessed that the different types of internal energy inside his body were coming out. He knew that his daughter wanted to marry him and he himself liked his personality. Also, as he never had a son, he was hoping that he would someday be the divine sect's chief. So he immediately nodded his head and said, "Since Headmaster Linghu requested this, I'll be lenient today."

Xiang Wentian moved in a flash with both his hands striking out to seal the acupoints on No Commandment and his wife, Tian Boguang and Yilin. He struck out really fast and mysteriously. Even though that granny had fast as lightning movement, she unexpectedly couldn't escape from his strike.

"Xiang... Xiang..." Linghu Chong was alarmed.

"Don't worry," Xiang Wentian laughed. "Sacred Chief already said he's going to be lenient." He turned his head and called out, "Eight guards, step out!"

Eight people wearing blue-green gowns came out and bowed. "We're ready to receive Left Protector Xiang's order!"

"Four males and four females," Xiang Wentian said.

Four males immediately stepped back and replaced by four females.

"These four people spoke improperly and ought to have been killed," Xiang Wentian said. "But Sacred Chief is lenient and tolerant and on account of Headmaster Linghu, he granted them leniency. Take them down the mountain and unseal their acupoints."

The eight respectfully bowed and acknowledged the order.

Xiang Wentian lowered his voice and relayed more order, "They're Headmaster Linghu's friends. Don't be rude to them."

"Yes!" the eight people answered. Taking these four people behind their backs, they went down from the peak.

Linghu Chong and Yingying saw No Commandment and the other three people had escaped with their lives so they let out a long sigh of relief.

"Thank... Thank you!" Linghu Chong said in trembling voice from his crouching position on the ground as he couldn't stand back up. Just then when he executed the sixteen moves, he forced the eight elders to retreat. However, each of these elders had excellent martial arts and his sword moves wouldn't have been able to injure them. Although he used these sixteen moves in the blink of an eye, he had consumed a large amount of energy to do so. Now, his chest and stomach felt even more painful.

Xiang Wentian was secretly worried but his face wasn't showing it. He laughingly said, "Brother Linghu, are you unwell?"

Back then, Linghu Chong and he combined together to fight against numerous heroes and became sword brothers. Even though they had rarely met, their friendship would never change through life and death. He took Linghu Chong's hand and supported him to sit back on his chair while secretly giving Linghu Chong his inner energy to help him fight against the turmoil in his internal energy. Linghu Chong thought that since he had the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' so with Xiang Wentian doing this, he might inadvertently absorb Xiang Wentian's martial art. Thus, he quickly struggled to break free from Xiang Wentian's grip. "Big Brother Xiang, don't! I'm... I'm ok now."

"From among the five mountains sword schools, only Hengshan School came to this meeting," Ren Woxing said. "The disciples from the remaining four schools are unexpectedly afraid to come up to this peak. We won't be polite anymore then."

At this time, Shangguan Yun quickly walked up to the peak and arrived at the front of the Deity's Palm. He bowed and said, "Reporting to Sacred Chief: Inside the cave on the Cliff of Contemplation, I found hundreds of corpses. Songshan School's Headmaster Zuo Lengchan is amongst the dead. There are also countless Songshan's, Hengshan's, and Taishan's master-hands. It seems they had killed each other."

"Ah!" Ren Woxing gasped. "Hengshan's Headmaster Mo Da is among them?"

"Subordinate carefully examined the corpses," Shangguan Yun reported. "I didn't find Mo Da among them. I also didn't find his traces anywhere in Huashan."

Linghu Chong and Yingying felt happy and surprised at the same time. They looked at each other and both thought, "Mr. Mo Da can mysteriously appear and disappear, and he actually managed to escape from danger. I'm guessing he might have pretended to be dead amongst the corpses until everything was safe before coming out."

Then they heard Shangguan Yun continuing, "Taishan School's Yuqingzi and Yuyinzi are both dead."

Ren Woxing was very displeased to hear this. "What... What else?"

"Outside that cave," Shangguan Yun continued. "There's another corpse."

"Who is it?" Ren Woxing asked hastily.

"Subordinate checked and he was Huashan School's Headmaster," Shangguan Yun reported. "He's the newly appointed headmaster of the Five Mountains School, the Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun."

He knew Linghu Chong would inevitably be the sect's chief in the future, and that Yue Buqun was his master, so that was why he spoke so respectfully about him.

When Ren Woxing heard Yue Buqun had also died, he couldn't help feeling disappointed. He asked, "Who... Who else has died?"

"When subordinate was inside the cave on the Cliff of Contemplation checking things out, I heard there was sound of fighting behind the cave," Shangguan Yun said. "I came out to take a look and saw a group of Huashan School's people and Taishan School's priests fighting each other. They were saying that the other group had killed their master. Both parties fought violently and many died. I've brought them here to receive Sacred Chief's punishment."

Ren Woxing hummed and said, "Yue Buqun was killed by Taishan School? Who in Taishan School has the ability to do

that?"

From the Heng-Shan School, Yiqing said in a clear voice, "No! Yue Buqun was killed by a sister from the Heng-Shan School."

"Who?" Ren Woxing demanded.

"The one who just went down the peak, little martial sister Yilin," Yiqing answered. "Yue Buqun killed our Abbess Master and Martial Uncle Dingyi. Everyone in our school hates him to the bone. Today, with the blessing of Buddha, Abbess Master and Martial Uncle Dingyi borrowed little martial sister's hand to punish this evildoer."

"Hmm," Ren Woxing hummed. "That's how it is! That can be said the heaven's net is great and no one can escape." His disappointment was evident in his speech.

Xiang Wentian and the elders were looking at each other, and were all feeling dejected. This time, the Sun Moon Sect had come to Huashan and had planned everything meticulously. Not only had all the master-hands from the sect came out, they had also gathered all the subordinates from each clan, each stronghold, each cave, and each island to force the five mountains sword schools to submit to them. If the five schools didn't want to submit, then they would immediately be annihilated. Then Ren Woxing and Sun Moon Sect would control the world. They would continue with Shaolin and Wudang Schools, and none from among the orthodox path would be able to resist. The business of long live the chief and unifying the Jianghu was to be settled today on the Peak of Morning Sun at Mount Huashan. Unexpectedly, Zuo Lengchan, Yue Buqun, and the masters from Taishan School had killed each other, and the whereabouts of Mr. Mo Da was unknown. There also weren't many left of the juniors from the four schools. The meticulous planning and preparation that had been done by Ren Woxing had all been useless.

Ren Woxing got angrier as he thought more. He shouted, "Bring those dogs from the five sword schools up here!"

"Yes!" Shangguan Yun replied. He turned around to go down the peak to get them.

The different types of internal energies that were disturbed in Linghu Chong's body gradually calmed down. When he heard

Ren Woxing said 'Bring those dogs from the five sword schools up here', he still felt unhappy because even though Ren Woxing wasn't scolding himself, Heng-Shan School was still part of the five mountains sword schools.

After some time, shouting were heard as two elders from the Sun Moon Sect led a group of sect's people herding thirty three disciples from the Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan School up to the peak. Originally, Huashan School didn't have that many disciples, but most of the master-hands from Songshan, Taishan, and Hengshan Schools who came to Mount Huashan had died. These thirty three disciples were not only nameless, each one of them were also injured. If not for the Sun Moon Sect's people helping them to walk, they wouldn't have been able to get up the peak. Ren Woxing was furious when he saw them. Without waiting for them to come closer, he shouted, "Why do I want these dogs to come up here for? Take them down, take them all down!"

"As ordered by Sacred Chief," those two elders replied and brought those thirty disciples down from the peak.

Ren Woxing swore a few times before he suddenly laughed aloud. "The actions of the five mountains sword schools can be said to be unforgivable by heaven. We don't have to do anything and they're already killing each other. From now on, they no longer exist in Jianghu."

Xiang Wentian along with ten elders bowed and said, "This is Sacred Chief's great fortune. All those little bandits died by themselves."

Xiang Wentian also said, "Within the five mountains sword schools, Heng-Shan School is the only one left. This is all because of Headmaster Linghu's leadership. From now on, Heng-Shan School and our divine sect will have the same root different branches. We're going to be prosperous and glorious. Congratulations Sacred Chief to obtain a young hero with no equal in this world to be your vice."

"That's right!" Ren Woxing said. "Left Protector Xiang said it well. Little brother Linghu, from today onwards, you can disband your Heng-Shan School. All the Shi Tai and the female disciples in your school are all welcome to come to our Dark Wood Cliff.

Otherwise, it won't be appropriate to stay at Mount Heng-Shan. Then you can take this Heng-Shan's remnants as your Vice-Chief's personal army, haha, haha!" He looked up at the sky and let out a loud laugh that shook the valley.

When they heard the words 'Vice-Chief', all of them were stupefied. A moment later, they all cheered and cries from all directions were heard, "Hero Linghu be our sect's Vice-Chief! It's very good!" "Congratulations Sacred Chief getting an excellent deputy!" "Congratulations Sacred Chief, congratulations Vice-Chief!" "Long live to Sacred Chief, Long live to Vice-Chief!" All the people from the sect had long regarded Linghu Chong as their Chief's son-in-law, and as he was also appointed as Vice-Chief, it was natural that he would inherit the chief position in the future. They knew he was an easy-going person and when he ascends into power, they most likely wouldn't have to be so anxious like the current time, when they were forever in fear. The rest of the Jianghu heroes here had most likely followed Linghu Chong in attacking the Shaolin Temple and had gone through trials and tribulations with him. Or perhaps, they had received Yingying's kindness in getting the medicine. They all supported him from the bottom of their hearts.

"Congratulations Vice-Chief," Xiang Wentian happily said. "Let's drink your celebratory wine to welcome you to the sect first. Then we'll drink your celebratory wine for your marriage to young lady. What a double happiness, happiness on top of happiness."

But Linghu Chong was at a loss. He knew this matter should not happen but he also didn't know how to decline it. Another thought was if he declined this then his wish to marry Yingying would not happen. Also, once Ren Woxing was angered, he might even be killed. He didn't regret dying, but he was afraid all the disciples of Heng-Shan School might all be killed right here. Should he decline it immediately, or should he agree for the time being to let the Heng-Shan's disciples to go down the mountain safely? He slowly turned his head around to look at the Heng-Shan's disciples. Some of them were looking angry, some had their heads lowered looking sad, some were looking apprehensive; none of them knew what to do.



Then he heard Shangguan Yun said in a clear and loud voice, "Under the leadership of Sacred Chief and the help of Vice-Chief, let's burn Shaolin, destroy Wudang, Kunlun, and Emei. Then we'll also annihilate the Beggar Clan. This will be done easily. Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu! Long live Vice-Chief, your benevolent is endless!"

Linghu Chong was hesitating in making a decision. But hearing Shangguan Yun giving him an ode 'Long live Vice-Chief, your benevolent is endless', even though it was still not as much as what Ren Woxing received, if he really became the Vice-Chief then this ode would forever follow him. Thinking till here, he felt it was very comical and couldn't help uttering a laugh. This laughter seemed like a ridicule and when they heard it, the whole Peak of Morning Sun became quiet all of a sudden.

"Headmaster Linghu," Xiang Wentian addressed him. "Sacred Chief gives you this Vice-Chief position. This means among everyone in Wulin, there's only one person above you and you have tens of thousands of people below you. Quickly thank Sacred Chief."

Suddenly, Linghu Chong was enlightened. Without preparation, he stood up and spoke towards the Deity's Palm, "Chief Ren, junior has two big matters that I'd like to discuss with Chief."

"You might as well say it," said a smiling Ren Woxing.

"The first matter," Linghu Chong said. "Junior was entrusted the position of Heng-Shan School's headmaster by Dingxian Shi Tai and I took up the position. Even if I can't improve the prestige of Heng-Shan School, I mustn't take the Heng-Shan School into the Sun Moon Divine Sect either. Otherwise, later under the Nine Fountains, how would I have the face to meet Dingxian Shi Tai? That's the first matter. The second matter is personal, I'm asking Chief to let your daughter be my wife."

When the crowd heard him mentioned the first matter, they felt things would go bad. But hearing him following it up with a public marriage proposal, they looked at each other smiling.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, "The first matter is easily solved. Just give the headmaster position of Heng-Shan School to a Shi Tai here. After you swear the oath to join our

divine sect, we can then discuss if Heng-Shan School still needs to join the sect or not. The second matter, Yingying and you are perfectly suited to each other and the whole world already knows. Of course I agree to her marrying you. Why need to be so worry for? Haha, haha!"

Everyone shouted their agreements and was calling out happily.

Linghu Chong turned his head around and took a glance at Yingying. Both her cheeks were crimson and her face showing her delight. He waited until the laughter from the crowd died down before he said in a clear voice, "Because of Chief's kindness, junior has been invited to join the honourable sect and I was also given a high position. But junior is a plain person who doesn't follow custom, so if I join the honourable sect, I'll definitely ruin Chief's big matter. After careful consideration, I'm hoping Chief withdraw the offer."

Ren Woxing was angered and he coldly said, "You're saying you don't want to join the divine sect?"

"That's right!" Linghu Chong replied.

Those two words were said determinedly and it left no doubt. In that moment, everyone on the Peak of Morning Sun lost the colours on their faces.

"The different types of internal energies you've accumulated in your body manifested today," Ren Woxing said. "Half a year from now, give or take three months, they'll manifest again. Then each time it does, it'll be even worse. As for the method to harmonize them, I'm the only one in the whole world to know how to do it."

"That day in the Hangzhou Plum Manor and also at the foot of Mount Shaoshi in the middle of the snow field, Chief already told me about this," Linghu Chong said. "Junior just tasted the feeling of these different types of inner energies manifesting. It's like my body was going through a thousand deaths. But a gentleman will walk through Jianghu without caring about being death or alive, sad or happy."

Ren Woxing snorted. "You can still talk so bravely. Today, your Heng-Shan School is all in my grasp. I won't let a single one of

you to go down the mountain alive. I can do that as easy as turning my hand over."

"Although Heng-Shan School is mostly women, we have no fear," Linghu Chong said. "If Chief wants to kill us then we pledge to fight to the death."

Yiqing waved a hand and all the disciples of Heng-Shan School stood behind Linghu Chong.

"We as disciples of Heng-Shan School follow the headmaster's order, we're not afraid of dying," Yiqing shouted.

"We're not afraid of dying!" the rest of the disciples shouted together.

"The enemies are many, we're few," Zheng E said. "We've also fallen into a trap. Later, heroes in Jianghu will find out how our Heng-Shan School fight to the death."

Ren Woxing was furious. He looked up to the sky and laughed aloud. "If I kill you today, they're going to say I setup this ambush to harm you. Linghu Chong, bring your disciples back to Mount Heng-Shan. One month from now, I'm going to personally go to Xianxing Peak. If by that time a dog or a bird can remain alive on Mount Heng-Shan, then you can regard me as gutless."

The sect's people cried out, "Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu! Slaughter on Mount Heng-Shan, dogs and bird won't be spared!"

According to Sun Moon Sect's cries, going up Xianxing Peak to annihilate the Heng-Shan School was only one climb away. Regardless of how Heng-Shan School prepared their defences once they went back, Sun Moon Sect was certain to slaughter them. Previously when the five mountains sword schools became enemy with the Sun Moon Sect, the five schools supported each other. If one school had a difficulty, the other four schools would come to help. Over the last one hundred years, this had kept the situation unchanged with no side winning or losing. Now, with only one school remaining from the five mountains sword school alliance, of course there would be no way for them to resist. This point was understood by everyone in Heng-Shan School.

When Ren Woxing said he wanted to slaughter the Heng-Shan School without sparing any bird or dog, it wasn't just big talk. Actually in Ren Woxing's mind, he was thinking of another

thing. Even though Linghu Chong's sword art was excellent, he would be unable to do it alone and Heng-Shan School by itself wouldn't be able to avert disaster. What was actually tugging at his mind was Shaolin and Wudang Schools. He was thinking that when Linghu Chong went back and suddenly asked for help from Shaolin and Wudang, these two schools would definitely dispatch their master-hands to Xianxing Peak to help. Then instead of attacking Heng-Shan, he'd attack Wudang and set up a three way ambush between Mount Shaoshi and Mount Wudang. Since Mount Wudang and Shaolin Temple were only hundreds of li apart, Wudang would certainly notify Shaolin when they were in trouble. By that time, a large number of experts from Shaolin Temple would have gone to Heng-Shan, while the rest would definitely come out of their nest to help Wudang. Then Sun Moon Sect would attack Shaolin Temple and burn it down first. By that time, the ambush would be sprung and it would annihilate the Shaolin monks en route to Wudang. Once that was accomplished, they'd go surround Mount Wudang but not attack immediately. They would wait for the masters from Shaolin and Wudang who had gone to Heng-Shan to hear of the news first. These master-hands would rush thousands of li to be back at Wudang, while Sun Moon Divine Sect would leisurely wait for them and ambushed them midway and things would go well.

After that, attacking Wudang and annihilating Heng-Shan would be as easy as turning his palm over. At this instant, he had decided on the plan to do away with Shaolin and Wudang, and he had been repeating it over and over in his head guessing that it would most likely succeed. Even though Linghu Chong had insulted him by not willing to enter the sect, it was only by his act that Sun Moon Divine Sect would succeed in uniting Jianghu. The happiness in Ren Woxing's heart was indescribable.

Linghu Chong turned to Yingying and said, "Yingying, you can't go with me?"

Yingying's eyes were already full of tears a long time ago. She couldn't endure it anymore and tears flowed down her cheeks. "If I follow you to Heng-Shan, that won't be filial; If I lose you, it's also not right. It's hard to fulfil both filialness and

comradeship. Brother Chong, Brother Chong, don't think about me anymore. In any case, you ..."

"What?"

"In any case, you won't live for much longer. I also wouldn't live one day longer than you."

"Your father already agreed to marry you to me," said a smiling Linghu Chong. "He's a Chief with long life, a Sacred Chief who unifies Jianghu, how can his words not be believed? How about if we pay respect to heaven and earth right here and become husband and wife?"

Yingying was startled. Although she knew Linghu Chong was a rash and unruly person, she didn't expect he would say such a thing. Her face couldn't help turning bright red. "How... How can we do that?"

Linghu Chong laughed aloud and said, "We'll part here then." He knew Yingying's heart. She was waiting for Ren Woxing to lead the sect to attack Heng-Shan, and once he died, she would also commit suicide. This was inevitable and there was nothing to stop it. If at this time she could do away with custom and agree to marry him on this Peak of Morning Sun and go back together to Mount Heng-Shan, then they could've enjoyed a few days as newlyweds and died together later on. There would've been no regret.

But this act was just too shocking, it didn't matter when Linghu Chong who lived like a beggar did it. But for Young lady Ren, who was shy and proper, she definitely couldn't do it. Moreover, if she did this, then it would also make her not filial. So after he laughed, he cupped his fists towards Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and the elders around there.

"Linghu Chong will respectfully wait for you all at Xianxing Peak!" Linghu Chong said. Once he finished, he turned around to go.

"Wait!" Xiang Wentian quickly interrupted. "Bring the wine over! Brother Linghu, if we don't get drunk today, we won't have the chance later on."

Linghu Chong laughed heartily. "Wonderful, wonderful! Brother Xiang really knows me."

When the Sun Moon Sect came to Mount Huashan, they had planned everything meticulously. When Xiang Wentian shouted 'bring the wine over', subordinates carrying jugs of wine immediately came over, broke open the cover, and poured the wine. Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong each drank a bowl.

From the crowd, a short and stout person walked out. That person was Old Man and he said, "Master Linghu, I will always remember your benevolence. I salute you with a bowl today." As he finished saying this, he heaved a bowl and gulped it down. He was only a nobody who was under the jurisdiction of the Sun Moon Sect and his position was nowhere near that of Xiang Wentian. When Linghu Chong wasn't willing to join the sect, he had publicly insulted Ren Woxing. So a small fry like Old Man daring to come forward to toast Linghu Chong would probably meet with death soon. He put comradeship above his own life and didn't think of the dangers facing him in the future. When the crowd saw him so daring, they secretly admired him.

Zu Qianqiu, Ji Wushi, Blue Phoenix, Huang Boliu, and other people came forward one by one and toasted him. Linghu Chong drank his bowl of wines and saw the people coming up to toast him were unending. He thought, "So many friends regard me and Linghu Chong hasn't lived in vain. But why do I have to kill them?" He lifted his bowl and said, "Friends, Linghu Chong can't drink anymore so let's stop drinking for today. When you come to attack Heng-Shan, I'll prepare wine at the bottom at the mountain and we'll get drunk before we fight!" He gulped down a bowl when he finished saying his speech.

The crowd said together, "Headmaster Linghu, a straight talk from a straightforward person!"

There were also people who said, "After we get drunk, we'll fight a drunken fight. It'll be interesting."

Linghu Chong tossed his wine bowl on the ground and drunkenly walked down the peak. Yiqing, Yihe, and the other Heng-Shan's disciples followed him down the peak.

When the crowd was sharing a drink with Linghu Chong, Ren Woxing was smiling and didn't utter a word. But his heart was thinking on how to prepare the three way ambush between Shaolin and Wudang; How to pretend to attack Heng-Shan to

lead the experts from Shaolin and Wudang Schools to go and help; How to open one side of Wudang during the attack to let someone escape through to get help from Shaolin Temple; Also, how to do this in a manner that the strategists in the opponent camp do not figure out the plan. When Linghu Chong went down the mountain, all the plans on destroying Wudang and subduing Shaolin had more or less been formed in his heart. He also thought, "These chaps actually dared to toast that little kid in front of me. This debt will be settled slowly. I'm going to use them for now and not do anything for now. Wait until Shaolin, Wudang, and Heng-Shan Schools are destroyed, then everyone who toasted Linghu Chong today won't have a good fate."

Suddenly he heard Xiang Wentian said, "Everyone hear me: Sacred Chief knows Linghu Chong is stubborn and doesn't take \*\*\* kissing (I can't think of a better word) but he still tried to persuade him with nice words. Even though Sacred Chief is a broad-minded person and loves a talented person, he has a deeper meaning in doing this that Linghu Chong couldn't grasp. Today, we could've easily destroyed Songshan, Taishan, Huashan, and Hengshan Schools. Sun Moon Divine Sect, glory to the sect!"

The sect's disciples cried out, "Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu!"

Xiang Wentian waited until their voices died down before he continued, "There's still Shaolin and Wudang Schools in Wulin. They're our sect's biggest dangers. Sacred Chief wanted to use Linghu Chong to set up his plan in destroying Shaolin and annihilating Wudang. Sacred Chief's plan is foolproof and he had the whole idea in his mind already. He had already anticipated that Linghu Chong wouldn't agree to join the sect and sure enough, he didn't agree to join the sect. So we toasted Linghu Chong before just as ordered by Sacred Chief!"

When the sect's disciples heard this, they all thought, "So that's how it is!" Then they all shouted, "Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Xiang Wentian had followed Ren Woxing for so many years and knew what his personality was like. When the feeling of comradeship was roused in his heart, he toasted Linghu Chong. He knew this would make Ren Woxing unhappy, but it didn't

matter for him. But when the remaining people also toasted him, it was unavoidable that they would be killed later. So he quickly composed a speech in order to save Ren Woxing's face and to also save Old Man, Ji Wushi, and those people's lives. In saying this, when the people toasted Linghu Chong, they had not ruin Ren Woxing's authority and instead appeared to make him look to have foresighted it. When Ren Woxing heard Xiang Wentian related it in such a way, he felt really happy and secretly thought, "Left Protector Xiang has after all followed me for many years so he knows what I'm thinking. But, even though he knows I want to destroy Shaolin and annihilate Wudang, he still couldn't guess the method on how I'm going to do that. The strategy for this will be revealed step by step, even he wouldn't know of the whole plan before hand."

"Sacred Chief is so knowledgeable. Everything in this world is already calculated by him," Shangguan Yun shouted. "What Sacred Chief wants us to do then we'll do it, we won't go wrong."

"Wherever Sacred Chief points us to, we'll go," Bao Dachu said. "We'll go through water and fire, we won't balk a tens of thousands of deaths."

"For Sacred Chief, dying a hundred thousands times is better than living without purpose," Qin Weibang cried out.

Another person said, "Brothers, you've all said it. These last few days had been the most interesting days in our lives, we'd been able to see Sacred Chief everyday. Seeing Sacred Chief once gives us strength and refreshes our minds, just like we've practiced inner energy for ten years."

Another person said, "Sacred Chief illuminates the world making our Sun Moon Sect favoured by the common people, also like the rain coming down after a long drought. Everyone's happy and they're giving thanks."

Another person said, "Heroes from ancient times till now, the grand heroes, holy saints, none of them is able to reach Sacred Chief. How can Confucius' martial art be as good as Sacred Chief? Marquis Guan is the measure of braveness, but how can he measure up against Sacred Chief's wisdom? Even though Zhuge's stratagem is high, how would he fare with a sword against our Sacred Chief?"



The sect's disciples cheered loudly and they called out, "Confucius, Marquis Guan, Zhuge Liang, who can compare with our Sacred Chief!"

"After our divine sect unites the Jianghu, we'll get all the statues of Confucius out of the culture temple and all the Guan Yu's statues out of the martial temple" Bao Dachu said. "We'll erect Sacred Chief's statues in their places!"

"Long live to Sacred Chief, long live!" Shangguan Yun shouted. "Our child and grandchildren, eighteen generations of our descendants, all of them will follow Sacred Chief."

The crowd called out at the same time, "Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu! Long live, unify the Jianghu!"

Ren Woxing heard his subordinates flattering him endlessly. Although some of these praises were rather fantastical, he thought he could use some of them. He thought, "Some of these talks aren't wrong. Zhuge Liang's martial art is definitely not my match, and when he conducted the six campaigns out of Mount Qi, he wasn't successful at all. So talking of wisdom and knowledge, is he any better than me? Guan Yu crossed five passes and slayed six generals, this is brave. But if he were to fight me alone, how could withstand against my 'Art of Essence Absorbing'? Confucius only had no more than three thousands disciples, while my subordinates number in the thirty thousands. He led three thousands disciples running here and there, and ran out of food and couldn't do anything. I led tens of thousands of people to across the world and go wherever I wish without any problem. Confucius' ability and wisdom when compared to Ren Woxing's aren't that far apart."

Hearing the cries of 'Long live, unify the Jianghu! Long live, unify the Jianghu!' shaking the ground, the people around the mountain also started to call out. The echoes resounded throughout the mountain. Ren Woxing smugly stood up.

When the sect's disciples saw him stood up, they all paid their respects by prostrating on the ground. All of a sudden, Peak of Morning Sun became quiet and there wasn't the slightest noise heard. Sunshine covered Ren Woxing's face and his entire body. The majestic looking Chief of the Sun Moon Sect looked like a god. Ren Woxing laughed aloud and said, "If only I could live

forever like to..." When he spoke till here, he was suddenly mute. He moved his energy to say the word 'today', but he felt his chest contracting and the word couldn't come out from his mouth. He pressed his chest using his right hand wanting to press down the blood bubbling up on his throat but he felt dizzy and the sunshine dazzled him.

# **Chapter 40: Harmony**

**Translated by: Pokit**

**Edited by: Hhaung.**



**The slipcover for the chair was embroidered with nine golden dragons surrounding a rising sun from the ocean. On the edges, it was studded with many pearls, diamonds, and gems.**

Linghu Chong went down the mountain in a drunken state and it wasn't until midnight that he finally woke up. When he woke up, he discovered he was lying in the wilderness with the Heng-Shan's disciples sitting far away to guard him and that he was also having a splitting headache. He was thinking that he wouldn't be able to see Yingying ever again and his heart ached thinking about it. When their party finally arrived at Xianxing Peak on Mount Heng-Shan, they first went to Dingxian, Dingjing, and Dingyi Shi Tai's altar to report they had taken their revenge.

They anticipated Sun Moon Sect would attack anytime whether it was dawn or dusk. After the fighting finished, Heng-Shan School would definitely be destroyed. They already foresaw this defeat a long time ago and instead of worrying, they instead felt relief. Monk No Commandment and his wife, along with Yilin and Tian Boguang, already met with them at the foot of Mount Huashan and they went back together to Mount Heng-Shan. Everyone was thinking that if they diligently practised their martial art, they still wouldn't be able to kill that many more people from the Sun Moon Sect. So thinking that it was of no benefit to them, they simply didn't practice their sword art at all. Some people would read the scripture diligently every day, while the rest would play around the mountain. Heng-Shan School originally had very strict commandments and they had lessons day and night without any idle time. But these days, they were very relaxed.

A few days had passed when they suddenly saw ten monks walking up towards the Xianxing Peak. They were headed by the Shaolin Temple's Abbott, Great Master Fangzheng. Linghu Chong was in his living hut drinking wine and singing songs when he suddenly heard Great Master

Fangzheng was coming. He couldn't help feeling startled and happy at the same time, and he quickly came out to welcome him. Great Master Fangzheng saw both his feet were bare, and he didn't even have time to put on his shoes. He smiled and said, "When the ancient people were in a hurry to welcome guests, they still had time to wear shoes. But Headmaster Linghu doesn't wear shoes to welcome us. Your sincerity is even more than those ancient people."

Linghu Chong bowed to give his propriety. "When Great Master Fangzheng comes, Linghu Chong has never welcomed you from far. So I'm actually very afraid. Great Master Fangsheng has also come."

Fangsheng smiled.

Linghu Chong saw the remaining eight monks all had white beards floating on their chins. When he inquired their names, he found out they were all reverend monks of the 'Fang' generation. Linghu Chong welcomed all the reverend monks to enter his living hut and they sat on the putuan. This living hut was originally Dingxian Shi Tai's place and it had no dust around. But when Linghu Chong lived here, the whole place was filled with jugs of wine, wine bowls, and everywhere was a mess. Linghu Chong's face turned red and he said, "It's messy, please don't blame me."

"I came today to pay respect to the mountain then to discuss an important matter," said a smiling Fangzheng. "Headmaster Linghu, you don't need to be so polite." He waited for a tick before continuing, "I heard Headmaster Linghu didn't accept the Vice Chief position in Sun Moon Sect in order to protect Heng-Shan School. You've also disregarded your own life by doing this and you were also willing to abandon Young Lady Ren, who's such a good companion to you. Everyone from the orthodox path admires you very much for this."

Linghu Chong was startled and he thought, "I wasn't willing because of Heng-Shan School as well as not to implicate all of Wulin. I didn't allow the school's disciples to

leak this matter out to prevent Shaolin and Wudang Schools from coming to help and getting involved in the big fight and increasing the number of deaths and injuries. I didn't expect Great Master Fangzheng to still manage to get the news." He then said, "Great Master absurdly praised me, making me very ashamed. Junior and Sun Moon Sect's Chief Ren have a lot of grudges and disputes between us. I also lost Young Lady Ren's love. There's nothing I can do about this. Great Master, don't wrongly praise me, I don't deserve it."

"Chief Ren wants to lead his men to give your honourable school trouble," Great Master Fangzheng said. "Right now, Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools have all deteriorated and Heng-Shan School is standing by itself without asking for help from outside. Headmaster Linghu, you didn't send anyone to my humble temple to ask anyone to come. Could it be that all the monks in my Shaolin School are afraid of dying and want to preserve their lives? And they also don't care about justice and righteousness in Wulin?"

Linghu Chong stood up and replied, "I don't dare to assume that. In the past, Junior didn't check myself and got to know many people from the Sun Moon Sect. Then all sorts of difficult matters came up because of this. Junior thinks a man must take responsibilities for what he has done. My heart is already restless since I've implicated the whole Heng-Shan School in this. How can I dare to startle Great Master and Priest Chongxu? If Shaolin and Wudang Schools came to help and lost a lot of people, then it'll be Junior's fault that even ten thousands death wouldn't be able to repay."

"Headmaster Linghu, what you said was wrong," said a smiling Fangzheng. "The Devil Sect has wanted to destroy our Shaolin, Wudang, and five mountains sword schools since a hundred years ago. At that time, I wasn't even born, so how does that have to do with Headmaster Linghu?"

Linghu Chong nodded. "My deceased master often taught me that the demonical and the orthodox can't stand

together. The Devil Sect and our orthodox schools have been fighting for years and the enmity between both is very deep. Junior's understanding of this was shallow and I thought both parties were able to yield a step and change for the better. Junior never knew that even though Chief Ren and I have a deep origin, at the end, we must still bear arms at each other."

"You said both parties yielding a step and change for the better. What you said is right," Fangzheng said. "Sun Moon Sect and our orthodox schools have been fighting for years. Actually, the reason for this wasn't something so great that we want them to all die or they want us to all die. The only reason was because the leaders of both parties want to control Wulin by himself and wished the other party to be destroyed because of it. That day, when Priest Chongxu, Headmaster Linghu, and I talked at the Hanging Temple, we were there because of the worry that Songshan's Headmaster Zuo wanted to merge the five mountains sword schools into one. We were afraid of his wild ambition in ruling Wulin by himself." He let out a long sigh when he spoke till here. He then continued, "I heard Sun Moon Sect's Chief has a motto, something like 'Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu'. Since this is already in his heart, how can Wulin have a day of peace? In Jianghu, each clan and each school has its own purpose and they're all very different. Unify the Jianghu, this will never happen."

Linghu Chong agreed with this and nodded. "Great Master Abbott said it right."

"Chief Ren said that within a month he won't spare a dog or a bird on Mount Heng-Shan," Fangzheng said. "His words are like the mountain and they couldn't be altered. Right now, the master-hands from Shaolin, Wudang, Kunlun, Emei, and Kongtong Schools are already assembled at the foot of Mount Heng-Shan."

"Ah!" Linghu Chong was startled and he jumped up. "Really? All the schools' seniors have come to help, Junior



didn't know. I really should be punished."

Since Heng-Shan School knew that the Devil Sect would one day attack, no one there was feeling lucky so they had not bothered putting up sentries and guards around the place. So much so that the sentries at the foot of the mountain had even been withdrawn.

Linghu Chong continued, "Reverend monks, please rest up here. Junior will lead my school's disciples down the mountain to welcome them."

Fangzheng shook his head. "All the schools are on the same boat in this and are helping each other to fight the enemy. There's no need for small talk, we've arranged everything."

"Yes," Linghu Chong acknowledged, and he asked, "When did Great Master Abbott find out that Sun Moon Sect wants to attack Heng-Shan School?"

"I received a letter from a senior and found out everything," Fangzheng replied.

"Senior?" Linghu Chong was thinking that Great Master Fangzheng's position in Wulin was already very high, so how could there be someone even more senior than him?

Fangzheng smiled and answered, "This senior is a famous elder from Huashan School. He once taught sword art to Headmaster Linghu."

"Grand martial uncle Feng!" Linghu Chong excitedly said.

"It is Senior Feng," Fangzheng confirmed. "Senior Feng dispatched six friends to Shaolin Temple to reveal what Headmaster Linghu said on top of the Peak of Morning Sun. These six friends speak in somewhat a roundabout manner and aren't very clear, so it's a little troublesome, and they also like to dispute what each other say. But after talking to them for a few hours and patiently listening to them, I finally understood." When he said till here, he couldn't help smiling.

"They're the Peach Valley Six Fairies?" a smiling Linghu Chong asked.

Fangzheng smiled. "They are the Peach Valley Six Fairies."

"When Junior arrived at Huashan, I wanted to pay my respect to Grand martial uncle Feng," Linghu Chong happily told Fangzheng. "But many things kept coming up until I finally went down the mountain. From beginning to the end, I didn't manage to see him to kowtow. I never thought he'd know everything."

"Senior Feng's conduct is like a divine dragon, you can see his head but not his tail," Fangzheng replied. "He already conceals himself living in Huashan, and when the Sun Moon Sect was at Huashan going around without any fear, how could he just not care? Peach Valley Six Fairies were at Huashan to play around and they were captured by Senior Feng and locked up for several days. Later, he ordered them to go to Shaolin Temple to deliver the letter."

Linghu Chong thought, "Peach Valley Six Fairies were captured by Grand martial uncle Feng. They would definitely hide this matter and won't talk about it. But if I just talk at random about things, they'll finally reveal this." Then he said, "What does Grand martial uncle Feng want us to do?"

"Senior Feng was very modest in his words, he only said that he heard something unusual that needs to be told to me," Fangzheng told him. "He also said Headmaster Linghu is his beloved disciple and how you resisted the Devil Sect's invitation on top of the Peak of Morning Sun. He really liked what he saw and wanted me to take care of you. Actually, Headmaster Linghu's martial art is far above mine. This word 'take care', he was too serious."

Linghu Chong felt appreciative and he bowed before saying, "Great Master Abbott has been taking care of Junior more than once."

"You flatter me," Fangzheng replied. "When I found out about this, don't mention that Senior Feng ordered this, I would've done it myself solely relying on the deep origin between your honourable school and my school. Also, I

couldn't just put my hands in my sleeve on account of our friendship. Moreover, this matter concerns each school's survival. Once the Devil Sect destroyed Heng-Shan, do you think he'd let go of Shaolin and Wudang Schools? That's why I immediately sent out an epistle notifying each school to assemble at Heng-Shan and fight to the death together against the Devil Sect."

When Linghu Chong came down from the Peak of Morning Sun that day, he was already feeling dejected. He saw the Sun Moon Sect and felt that Heng-Shan School couldn't match them. So he was only waiting for the day that Ren Woxing would attack them, then everyone from Heng-Shan School would exert themselves in resisting and fight to the death. Even though there were people who offered the idea to ask for help from Shaolin and Wudang Schools, Linghu Chong asked them, "Even if Shaolin and Wudang Schools come to help, can they stop the Devil Sect?" That person immediately shut up. Linghu Chong also said, "Since there's no way to help Heng-Shan, why should we implicate Shaolin's and Wudang's disciples and make a lot of them lose their lives here?" In his heart, he actually didn't want to fight with Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian. Also, when his hope of marrying Yingying disappeared, he unwittingly tortured himself and felt his life in this world was no longer useful, and that it was better if he died first.

At this time, when he saw Fangzheng received Feng Qingyang's trust and came here to help, his spirit was roused. But he still had no interest to really fight to the death against those people from the Sun Moon Sect.

Fangzheng also said, "Headmaster Linghu, Buddhists have mercy in their heart and I'm not a brave person who would fight violently. If this matter can be settled in a friendly manner, then of course it's the best. But if we yield a step then Ren Woxing would advance a step. We can't yield in this matter at all or Chief Ren will annihilate each school from the orthodox path. Only if each of us kowtow to him and

praise him with 'Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu! Amitufo!'"

In his 'Long live to Sacred Chief, unify the Jianghu', he added the word 'Amitufo'. It was really comical and Linghu Chong couldn't refrain from smiling. "That's right. Junior only has to hear of that 'Sacred Chief', that 'Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu', and I had goose bumps all over my body. Junior doesn't get drunk after drinking thirty bowls of wine but to hear a lot of this 'Long live to Chief, unify the Jianghu', I couldn't help feeling dizzy and become drunk on the spot."

Fangzheng smiled. "Their Sun Moon Sect's incantation is definitely very formidable." He paused for a tick before continuing, "When Senior Feng was at the Peak of Morning Sun, he saw Headmaster Linghu getting dizzy. So he especially ordered the Peach Valley Six Fairies to bring over a secret formula for an internal energy technique, and he wanted me to give this to Headmaster Linghu. The Peach Valley Six Fairies don't speak clearly, but when it came to telling me the inner energy technique, they became clear. It was really rare. I think Senior Feng must've forced them to memorise this until they're very familiar with it. Headmaster Linghu, please lead the way to the inner hall so I can impart you this technique."

Linghu Chong respectfully led Great Master Fangzheng into a quiet room. This was the formula that Feng Qingyang had asked Fangzheng to impart to him so it was as if he had come personally to impart it to him. He immediately knelt in front of Fangzheng and said, "Grand martial uncle Feng treats disciple with so much kindness."

Fangzheng didn't decline his modesty and received his respect. "Senior Feng has a lot of expectation on Headmaster Linghu. He hopes you can practise diligently according to this technique."

"Yes," Linghu Chong replied. "Disciple will do as ordered."

Fangzheng slowly read aloud the formula for the technique while Linghu Chong tried to memorise it. The

formula wasn't that long, from beginning to the end, there were only around one thousands words. When Fangzheng finished reciting it, he wanted Linghu Chong to remember it. After some time, he recited it again. In total, he recited it five times. Linghu Chong was able to memorise it and recited it from the beginning to the end without mistake.

"Even though there's only around a thousand words in this internal energy formula that Senior Feng is passing on, it is actually very profound and it's not a small matter," Fangzheng said. "We're good friends, please forgive me for speaking frankly. Headmaster Linghu's sword art is profound, but it seems you're not good at internal energy technique."

"Junior only knows some trivial things about internal energy," Linghu Chong replied. "If Great Master doesn't mind, I'd still like to ask for some pointers."

Fangzheng nodded. "Senior Feng's inner energy technique and Shaolin School's inner energy technique are quite different. But all martial arts in this world have the same goal but use different approaches. The basic essence doesn't differ by too much. If Headmaster Linghu doesn't mind me being meddlesome then I'll try to explain it."

Linghu Chong knew he was the current Wulin's number one or two master. Obtaining his advice was no different than getting Grand Martial Uncle Feng's advice. That was why Grand Martial Uncle Feng had imparted him this technique so his internal energy could also be profound. Linghu Chong quickly bowed and said, "Junior will respectfully listen to Great Master's instructions."

"You flatter me!" Fangzheng replied. Then he immediately started to analyze the inner energy technique sentence by sentence, and he also told him all kinds of different things like breathing, energy movement, tuna(a breathing method), and the method to move the energy. Linghu Chong had learned the formula by heart and he originally remembered it very well. But when Great Master Fangzheng was analyzing the formula, only then did he

realise how each sentence contained numerous refined principles.

Linghu Chong had a high level of comprehension, but each sentence of this refined inner energy technique took him a long time to understand. It was good that Great Master Fangzheng was there to explain it to him in detail that he was able to take a peek into the marvellous realm of martial art study that he had never experienced before. He let out a long sigh and said, "Great Master Fangzheng, Junior has been fearlessly going around Jianghu for the last few years, it was because I didn't know how shallow my knowledge is. I'm really ashamed when thinking about it. Junior doesn't have much longer to live and unable to practise the wonderful inner energy technique passed down by Grand Martial Uncle Feng. But people in the old days had a saying, it's something like hear the right way in the morning, then dying at night won't be too serious. Is that saying right?"

"If a man in the morning hears the right way, he may die in the evening without regret!" Fangzheng corrected him.

"That's right, that's the saying," Linghu Chong said. "I once heard master said it. Hearing Great Master's advice today, it's really like a blind man being able to see. Even if I don't have any more time to practise it, I'm already happy."

"Our orthodox schools have all assembled near Mount Heng-Shan, and they're protecting all the important places," Fangzheng said. "When the Devil Sect comes to attack, we'll all work together and we won't lose. Headmaster Linghu, why are you being so pessimistic? This inner energy technique requires a few years to finish practising it, but if you practise it for a day then you'll get one day's benefit, and if you practise it for a little bit then you'll get a little bit's benefit. These next few days, there's no harm for Headmaster Linghu to start learning it. Take advantage of me disturbing your honourable mountain and we can also study it together."

"Junior appreciates Great Master's kindness."

"Brother Chongxu should be arriving any moment now. Should we go out and take a look?"

Linghu Chong quickly stood up and said, "I've neglected Priest Chongxu and the others."

He returned to the outside hall with Great Master Fangzheng, the hall was already lighted with candles. When the two of them were discussing martial art, more than six hours had passed and the sky had turned dark a long time ago. They saw three Taoist sitting on putuans talking with Great Master Fangsheng. One of these people was Priest Chongxu. When the three Taoist saw Fangzheng and Linghu Chong came out, they stood up together.

Linghu Chong paid his respects and said, "Heng-Shan is in trouble and we've received priests' help. Everyone from my humble school really doesn't know how to repay this."

Priest Chongxu quickly helped him up and smilingly replied, "I arrived here some time ago. I learned that Great Master Abbott and little brother are inside studying inner energy technique so I didn't dare to disturb you. Little brother has learned a wonderful inner energy technique, once you've learned how to use it then when Ren Woxing comes here, you can try it out on him and teach him a lesson."

"This inner energy technique is very refined," Linghu Chong said. "How can Junior learn it in just a few days? I heard the seniors from Emei, Kunlun, and Kongtong Schools have all arrived. I should invite them up and discuss our plan. What do seniors think of this?"

Chongxu replied, "They're hiding in secret to guard against that demon Ren from finding out. If you ask everyone to come up the mountain, then I'm afraid the information will be leaked out. When we came up the mountain, we also disguised ourselves. Otherwise, why didn't the disciples of my humble school announce us first?"

The moment when he first met Priest Chongxu appeared in Linghu Chong's mind. At that time, Priest Chongxu

disguised himself as an old man riding a donkey, and there were two other men following him. They were all actually masters from Wudang School. Right now, as he observed the other priests, he recognised them to be the other two elders who competed sword with him on the Hubei road.

Linghu Chong bowed and smilingly said, "Priests, your face changing technique is very good. If Priest Chongxu didn't mention it, Junior wouldn't have figured it out."

Those two priests disguised themselves as farmers at that time, one was carrying firewood and the other carrying vegetables. Both were gasping for breath, seemed like they were sick. At this time, they looked very healthy and only their eyes could be recognised. Priest Chongxu pointed to the elder who carried the firewood, "This is martial brother Qingxu." Then he pointed to the elder who carried the vegetable, "This is my martial nephew, his Taoist name is Chenggao." The four of them smiled at each other.

Qingxu and Chenggao both said, "Headmaster Linghu's sword art is very high."

Linghu Chong replied, modestly, "I apologize for the offence!"

"My martial brother's and martial nephew's sword art aren't very refined, but when they were young, they lived for more than ten years in the western region and learned one special skill," Chongxu said. "One is an expert in hidden traps and the other is an expert in bombs."

"Those skills are very rare," Linghu Chong commented.

"Brother Linghu," Chongxu said. "I brought them here because I have another purpose. I'm hoping they can help us in doing one big thing."

Linghu Chong didn't understand and blurted out, "To do one big thing?"

"I took the liberty to take one thing to your honourable mountain," Chongxu answered. "Brother Linghu, please take a look." He had a free and easy personality so he wasn't as restrained as Fangzheng. That was why one called him



'Brother Linghu', and the other called him 'Headmaster Linghu'. Linghu Chong felt it was quite odd and wanted to see what he took out from his bosom. Chongxu smiled and said, "This item is actually not small, it doesn't fit in my bosom. Martial brother Qingxu, ask them to come in."

Qingxu acknowledged the order and went out. Not long after, he led four farmer-looking men to come in. Each person was barefooted and each was carrying vegetables.

Qingxu said, "This is Headmaster Linghu and Shaolin Temple's Abbott." The four people bowed to give their respects.

Linghu Chong knew they must have high positions in Wudang. He quickly returned their propriety.

"Take it out and install it!" Qingxu ordered.

The four men took some wrapped bundles from inside the vegetables they were carrying. They opened the bundles revealing many wooden strips, ironware, nails, and springs. These four people worked really fast and they put those items together. A short time later, they finished making a grand chair. Linghu Chong was even more perplexed, pondering, "This grand chair has so many springs. I wonder what it's used for? Could it be for practising internal energy?"

After installing the chair, the four men took out two more wrapped bundles. These bundles contained the chair cushion and the chair cover which they put on the grand chair. Inside the quiet hall, glitters from the yellow brocade of the chair cover suddenly dazzled their eyes. Nine golden dragons had been embroidered into the brocade with the sun in the middle rising from the ocean. On the left, writings of 'Glory to Sacred Chief, To the Benefit of Common People' were seen. On the right was the writing 'Long Live the Chief, Unify the Jianghu'. Those nine dragons had their claws brandished and teeth snarling, looking very much alive. The calligraphy on the writings was strong and very pleasing to the eyes. Chains of pearls, diamonds, and all sorts of other precious stones

surrounded the letters. This humble and plain hall was covered by the lights from the jewels.

Linghu Chong clapped to cheer as he thought of Chongxu saying that Qingxu was once in the western region learning to make hidden traps. He said, "When Chief Ren sees this precious chair, he'll definitely sit in it. Then the traps in the chair will be sprung and take his life. Am I right?"

Chongxu whispered back, "Ren Woxing can respond really fast and his movement is like lightning. Even if the chair has a trap, he'll feel something's not right and jump up immediately. We won't be able to injure him then. This bottom of this chair has been installed with a fuse and a pack of explosives."

Once he said this, the faces of Linghu Chong and all the monks from Shaolin changed colour. Fangzheng prayed, "Amitufo!"

"The benefit of this trap is that anyone can sit on it without anything happening," Chongxu explained. "You need to sit for a while before the fuse is triggered. That Ren Woxing is a sceptical person and he's also very careful. When he sees this kind of chair on the Xianxing Peak, he definitely won't sit in it straight away and will get one of his subordinate to sit on it first. The covering on this chair has those gold dragons around the sun, there's also those 'Long Live the Chief, Unify the Jianghu' words, so anyone from the Devil Sect won't sit on it for too long. But once Ren Woxing sit on it, he won't give it up."

"Priest has considered this very thoroughly," Linghu Chong commented.

"Martial brother Qingxu has also prepared something else," Chongxu said. "If Ren Woxing doesn't sit and told people to take the cover and cushion off, and even tear the chair apart to have a look then the fuse will still be triggered. Martial nephew Chenggao has brought twenty thousands catties of explosives to this precious mountain. It seems we

won't be able to avoid ruining the scenery on this precious mountain."

Linghu Chong felt dread in his heart, he thought, "Twenty thousands catties of explosives! So much gunpowder exploding, even jade will burn. If Chief Ren is blown up, Yingying and Brother Xiang will be too."

Chongxu saw his face looked unusual. "The Devil Sect is saying they want to kill your honourable school. Once they've annihilated Heng-Shan School, they'll attack Shaolin and Wudang. We'll be ashes and this big disaster will be hard to fix. We've setup this treacherous plan to repay Ren Woxing. Although it's very dangerous, we'll get to do away with this head demon and get to save tens of thousands of lives in Wulin."

Great Master Fangzheng joined both his palms together. "Amitufo! Our merciful Buddha must also defeat demons and slay devils to save our lives. Killing a man to save thousands of lives is path of compassion and sorrow." When he said these words, he looked stately. All the monks and taoists there stood up and joined their palms together while lowering their heads. They said in unison, "Great Master Fangzheng is right."

Linghu Chong also knew what Fangzheng said was very reasonable. Sun Moon Sect wanted to annihilate the Heng-Shan School that even dogs and birds wouldn't be spared, while the schools from the orthodox path had planned to fry Ren Woxing to death. This was a matter of justice and righteousness and no one could say that it wasn't, but his heart was quite unwilling to kill Ren Woxing. As to killing Xiang Wentian, he would rather die first; As to the life and death of Yingying, he wasn't worried. He had always regarded their lives intertwined together and they will both die and live together so there was nothing to worry about. He saw all of them were looking at him. He hummed for a little while and said, "Since things have come to this, Sun Moon

Sect has forced us with no other option. I think Priest Chongxu's strategy will hurt the least people."

"Brother Linghu said it right," Chongxu praised. "'It hurts the least people, it's exactly what I was looking for."

"Junior is young and my knowledge is shallow," Linghu Chong replied. "The matter on Heng-Shan today, I'd like to ask Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu to preside over this big operation. Junior will lead my school's disciples and follow the plan."

Chongxu laughed. "I don't deserve it. You're the master on Heng-Shan. How can Brother Abbott and I, as guests, snatch the host position?"

"This is not Junior modestly stepping back," Linghu Chong explained. "I honestly like the two of you to handle it."

"Headmaster Linghu is very modest," Fangzheng said. "Brother Priest, you don't need to decline it either. The three of us will lead this big operation, but we'll let Brother Priest to issue the order."

Chongxu said a few more modest words before finally agreeing. "We've hidden people on all the passages going up Mount Heng-Shan. When the Devil Sect comes to attack the mountain, we'll definitely hear of something. That day when Brother Linghu led people to attack Shaolin Temple, we followed Zuo Lengchan's plan and left an empty city..."

Linghu Chong's face turned slightly red. "Junior made a big disturbance. I'm still terrified by it."

Chongxu laughed. "I never thought enemy from the past would become today's friend. We can't use that empty city plan again as it will raise Ren Woxing's suspicion. From my humble view, the whole Heng-Shan School should defend on top of the mountain with dozens of people from Shaolin and Wudang Schools. You must understand that when Devil Sect attacks, and if they can't see anyone from Shaolin and Wudang Schools coming to help, then it would go against reason. This bastard Ren Woxing would be able to guess something is up."

"That's right," Fangzheng and Linghu Chong replied in unison.

"The rest of the schools like Kunlun, Emei, and Kongtong don't need to reveal themselves," Chongxu went on. "They will hide inside the mountain caves. When Devil Sect comes to attack, Heng-Shan, Shaolin, and Wudang Schools will fight back and the fight must look real. The people we send out must all be first class fighters and the more we kill the better while trying not to get harmed ourselves."

Fangzheng sighed. "The master-hands from Devil Sect are like the cloud and they must have been preparing for this. This coming fight will have a lot of deaths and injuries from both sides."

"We'll look for some cliffs and prepare ropes. When we see we're no longer their match, we'll use the ropes to go down to the valley and make it hard for the enemy to chase us," Chongxu said. "After Ren Woxing had gained his victory, then he'll see this precious chair. Of course he'll be complacent and sit on it. When the explosives is triggered, that old demon Ren will find it impossible to escape without wings. We'll follow this with exploding the thirty two landmines along the eight routes going up Mount Heng-Shan. The Devil Sect will find no way to go down the mountain then."

"Thirty two landmines?" Linghu Chong queried.

"That's right," Chongxu answered. "Martial nephew Chenggao will go early tomorrow morning and go to the important spots of the routes going up Mount Heng-Shan. At each route, he's going to pick the four most important spots and bury the landmines there. When the landmines go off, there'll be no route going up and down the mountain. There'll be around ten thousands people from the Devil Sect going up Mount Heng-Shan, and all ten thousands of them will die of starvation; If twenty thousands go up the mountain then twenty thousands will die of starvation. We've learned Zuo

Lengchan's old plan, but this time we won't let them escape from a tunnel."

"That time we were really lucky to escape Shaolin Temple," Linghu Chong chimed in. Then as he thought about it, he uttered an 'oh'.

"Brother Linghu, now that you've learned of this plan, is there anything not right?" Chongxu asked.

"Junior thinks that when Chief Ren comes up Mount Heng-Shan and sees that precious chair, he'll definitely be happy but he'll be sure to suspect it," Linghu Chong replied. "Why would Heng-Shan School make this kind of chair and embroider the words 'Long Live the Chief, Unify the Jianghu'? If this matter isn't made clear, then I think he probably won't sit down on it."

"I've also thought of this point," Chongxu answered. "Actually, whether that demon head Ren sit or not on that chair isn't crucial. The other fuse we've hidden on that chair will blow it also. When he's being proud of himself, taking all the praises of long live the chief, unify the Jianghu, then this disaster will struck. Later on, this will only become a conversation topic in Wulin."

Linghu Chong nodded his head. "Yes."

"Martial Uncle," Priest Chenggao interrupted. "Disciple has an idea, I'm not sure if it's feasible?"

"Say it out," Chongxu said, smiling. "Ask Great Master Abbott and Headmaster Linghu for their advice."

"I heard Headmaster Linghu and Chief Ren's daughter had a marriage agreement, but because the orthodox and the demonical can't be on the same road, the marriage was hindered," Chenggao said. "If Headmaster Linghu sends two Heng-Shan disciples to meet Chief Ren and says that on account of young lady Ren, you seek an especially skillful craftsman to make the precious chair for Chief Ren to sit on, and that you're hoping the two parties would have a truce to discuss peace. It doesn't matter if Chief Ren agrees or not,

but once he comes up Mount Heng-Shan, he'll see this precious chair and won't suspect it anymore."

Chongxu clapped excitedly and said, "This plan is wonderful. One..."

"No!" Linghu Chong shook his head.

Chongxu was startled and knew he had been embarrassed, so he asked, "What's Brother Linghu's opinion?"

"Chief Ren wants to kill my Heng-Shan School, and I'll do my best to fight back and use wisdom to fight a strong enemy, everything can be done," Linghu Chong replied. "He's coming to kill us and we're going to explode him, but I'll never say false words to deceive him."

"Good!" Chongxu praised. "Brother Linghu is frank, very admirable. Whatever we do, whether that demon head Ren suspects it or not, he only has the intention of harming people to come up Mount Heng-Shan, so we're going to make him suffer."

After that, they discussed the details on how to defend, how to fight, how to cover up their ambush, how to retreat, and how to blow up the landmines. Each of these points was decided on. Chongxu was very meticulous and he was afraid they might have underestimated the enemy, so he dispatched another person to back up the person responsible for blowing up the landmines.

On dawn the next day, Linghu Chong guided them to look at the lay of the land. Qingxu and Chenggao selected the places to bury the landmines, prepared the fuses, and hid sentries to guard these places. Chongxu and Linghu Chong chose four rugged spots to make their retreats. Fangzheng, Chongxu, Linghu Chong, and Fangsheng would each guard one spot and they wouldn't let any enemy come near them. When the defenders were exhausted, they would be let down by ropes towards the valley down below. The last people to get to the valley below would use their swords to cut the ropes and not let the enemies to chase after them.

On the same day that afternoon, ten people from the Wudang School disguised themselves as farmers and wood gatherers. Under Qingxu's and Chenggao's directions, they planted the explosives. Heng-Shan School's disciples guarded each entrance to the mountain to prevent idler from going up the mountain, to protect against Sun Moon Sect from scouting the area and finding out all the secrets. After three busy days, everything was ready and they were now just waiting for Sun Moon Sect to come and attack. Counting the days, it had nearly been one month since they left Ren Woxing on the Peak of the Morning Sun. What that person said was certain to be fulfilled and there would be no error in his decided time. In these last few days, Chongxu, Chenggao and the other people had been busy, while Linghu Chong had been idle instead. Every day he silently went through the inner energy technique Fangzheng had imparted to him and practised it. Every time he met something he didn't understand, he'd consult with Fangzheng about it.

On the afternoon of that day, Yihe, Yiqing, Yilin, Zheng E, Qin Juan, and other female disciples were practising sword at the sword training hall, while Linghu Chong was at side giving advices. He saw that even though Qin Juan was still young, she quite understood the essence of the sword art. He praised, "Martial sister Qin is very bright. You already have the knack for this move, but..." He hadn't finished saying the words when he suddenly felt a wave of pain in his dantian region and immediately sat down. The disciples were all startled and they quickly rushed forward to help him up, they said in unison, "What happened?"

Linghu Chong knew the different types of internal energies in his bodies were coming out again, and the pain was so unbearable that he couldn't even speak. The disciples were in confusion when suddenly a flapping sound and two pigeons came flying in from the window.

"Aiyo!" they cried out in unison.



Heng-Shan School kept many letter pigeon. When Dingjing Shi Tai was at Fujian and when Dingxian and Dingjing Shi Tai were surrounded at the Dragon Spring Sword-Forging Valley, they had dispatched these letter pigeon to ask for help. Now, the two letter pigeons flying through the window were from the school's disciples who were guarding at the bottom of the mountain, and there were red paint daubed at their backs. With a glance, they knew the assault from the Sun Moon Sect had arrived. Since Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu arrived at Mount Heng-Shan, the disciples had seen strong helpers had arrived and everything was already prepared, and they were relieved. But unexpectedly during this urgent time, Linghu Chong had fallen sick.

Yiqing called out, "Yizhi, Yiwen, martial sisters, go report to Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu."

Both of them acknowledged the order and went.

Yiqing also said, "Martial sister Yihe, please ring the bell." Yihe nodded her heads a few times before flying out of the hall to go towards the bell tower.

Sounds of 'tang, tang, tang', 'tang, tang', 'tang, tang, tang', 'tang, tang' was heard. Three long ringing followed by two short ringing was heard coming from the bell tower, the sound traversing throughout the peak. Shortly after that, the bells from Tong Yuan Valley, Hanging Temple, Black Dragon Pass, and other big bells from the other temples were also heard. Great Master Fangzheng had left an order before hand on the method to alert the coming of the enemy, the bell was supposed to be rung with three long ringing followed by two short ringing. But the ringing of the bell must be slow and leisurely, and must not appear panicked and frightened. However, with Yihe being completely worried, and even though there's the word 'peace<sup>11</sup>' in her Buddhist name, her behaviour was anything but peaceful and the sound of the bell still showed her worry and impatient.

Heng-Shan School, Shaolin School, and Wudang School quickly moved according to the pre-arranged plan. Each of them moved to their spots to prepare in welcoming the enemy. In order to lower the casualties, no guard was placed in the passages between the foot of the mountain and the top of the Xianxing Peak, and the gate was opened wide to let the enemy come through. Once the enemy arrived at the top of the peak then the fighting will be joined.

After the bell sounds stopped, the chirpings of birds had become quiet around the peak. The experts from Kunlun, Emei, and Kongtong Schools all hid below the peak waiting for the Devil Sect people to all go up the peak. Once they received the order, they will cut off the retreat of the Devil Sect. To protect the secret plan, Chongxu didn't tell everyone of the landmines buried on the mountain passages. Devil Sect had a vast influence and for them to have spies within the disciples of Kunlun or the other schools would not be too surprising.

Linghu Chong heard the bells and he knew the Sun Moon Sect had come to attack them, but his stomach was like being slashed and stabbed by millions of sabres. The pain was enveloping his belly and it was churning underneath. Yilin and Qin Juan were frightened till their faces were colourless, and they didn't know what to do.

"We'll help Headmaster to go to Wuse Convent," Yiqing ordered. "Then we'll carry out Shaolin Abbott's and Priest Chongxu's plan."

Yu Sao and another old nun put their hands underneath him. Half supporting half lifting, they carried him to Wuse Convent.

They had just arrived at the convent's door when they heard the thundering sound of firecrackers going off, followed by the cries of the horns, and the booming of the drums. As expected, Sun Moon Sect had grandly carried out the operation to attack the mountain.

Fangzheng and Chongxu had found out of Linghu Chong's illness and they rushed out of the convent.

Chongxu said, "Brother Linghu, don't worry. I've already ordered Martial brother Qingxu to cover Wudang School's retreat. I'll be covering your honourable school's retreat."

Linghu Chong nodded his thanks.

Fangzheng said, "Headmaster Linghu, retreat down the valley first to avoid any negligence."

"No... Absolutely not!" Linghu Chong hastily replied. "Bring.. Bring my sword!"

Chongxu advised him further but Linghu Chong was unmoved. Suddenly, the sound of drums and horns ceased, followed by thundering voices calling out, "Long Live the Sacred Chief, Unify the Jianghu!" From this sound, it can be gathered there was at least four to five thousands people. Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong looked at each other and smiled.

Qin Juan brought Linghu Chong's sword over to him and presented it. Linghu Chong extended his hand wishing to take it but his right hand was continuously shaking and he couldn't hold it. Qin Juan hung the sword on his waist.

Suddenly they heard a very pleasing suona sound rose up<sup>12</sup>, it was definitely not the sound of battle.

In unison, a few people said in bright clear voices, "Sun Moon Sect's Sacred Chief wishes to go up Xianxing Peak to meet Heng-Shan School's Headmaster Linghu." These words had been spoken by the Sun Moon Sect's elders.

"Sun Moon Sect is giving their propriety first before fighting," Fangzheng said. "We also can't be too petty. Headmaster Linghu, what do you think of letting them come up to the peak?"

Linghu Chong nodded his head a few times. At this time, a wave of pain had again assaulted his stomach. Fangzheng saw his face full of cold perspiration, he said, "Headmaster Linghu, the pain in your dantian is already excruciating,

there's no harm in using the inner energy method that Senior Feng imparted. Add it and revolve it, see what happens."

The different types of inner energies in Linghu Chong's body were conflicting and clashing about, if he add more to it and revolve it, that would be no different than using a sabre to injure himself. It would be like adding pain on top of pain, but the pain was already to the extreme and there was no thought of the consequence of doing this. He moved the energy according to the method and revolved it. As expected the energies clashed and the pain was even more excruciating than before, but after revolving it for a few times, those inner energies were back flowing like before. They flowed and converged like there was a track to flow. Even though the pain was like the old time, it wasn't clashing and striking chaotically anymore. He knew the place where the clashes happened now.

Fangzheng said slowly, "Heng-Shan School Headmaster Linghu, Wudang School Headmaster Priest Chongxu, Shaolin School Headmaster Fangzheng, we await respectfully for the Sun Moon Sect honourable Chief Ren's arrival." His voice wasn't loud and it was said slowly, but it still travelled very far.

Linghu Chong was effective in moving his inner energy. He now sat cross-legged, eyes observing the nose, the nose observing the heart, his left hand touched his chest, his right hand embraced his stomach, following the method that Fangzheng had imparted to him which he had practiced earlier. He had only learned this technique for a few days only, and even though Fangzheng had spoken to him everyday in details about it, his practice of it was still very shallow. But under the guidance of this method right now, these different inner energies were unexpectedly able to gradually merge. He didn't dare to be negligent, so with rapt attention, he revolved his inner energy. In the beginning, he was still able to hear the sound of drums and horns, but at the end, he couldn't even hear anything.

Fangzheng smiled seeing Linghu Chong was concentrating on practising martial art. He heard the drums were thundering, and the Sun Moon Sect people shouted, "Sun Moon Sect cultured and kind warrior, benefiting the common people, the honourable Sacred Chief is going up Heng-Shan!" After some time, the sound of drums gradually got nearer.

The path coming up to Xianxing Peak was very long and although the Sun Moon Sect people walked really fast, after some time, the sound of drums had only arrived at the middle of the mountain. The orthodox sect warriors hiding around the Mount Heng-Shan were all secretly scolding, "Rotten honourable chief, still not dead yet, what the heck are you doing making lots of noise around here?"

The people who were to welcome the enemy all had their hearts bouncing wildly. Each of them had originally predicted the Devil Sect people would kill their way up and they would immediately engage in a fierce battle. After killing a score of the sect's people, and waiting for more enemies to arrive on top and becoming even stronger, they would then escape down the valley. But they never expected Ren Woxing to act like an emperor going on a tour and making a lot of noise as he came up to the peak. It was inappropriate for them to start their operation, but they had to detain their hearts harder from doing so.

After a long time, Linghu Chong felt the various inner energies in his dantian region had slowly been pushed down and the pain was gradually decreasing. His heart calmed and he immediately thought, "Chief Ren wants to come up to the peak?"

"Ah!" Linghu Chong gasped, and he jumped up.

"Feeling better?" Fangzheng asked, smiling.

"Fighting yet?" Linghu Chong queried.

"Not yet!"

"Very good!" Linghu Chong said. With a hiss, he drew his sword.

But he saw Fangzheng and Chongxu were not holding any weapons. While Yihe, Yiqing, and the other disciples were lining up in rows in front of Wuse Convent quietly in Heng-Shan school formation, with their swords still sheathed and hanging on their waists. He guessed that Ren Woxing hadn't arrived on the mountain top yet and that he had been too anxious, so he laughed aloud and put his sword back in the scabbard. He then heard sounds of suona and drums ceased, and the sounds of flute and huqin rose up. He thought, "Chief Ren is so pretentious, coming up the mountain personally accompanied with live music." The more pretentious he was, the funnier Linghu Chong thought it was.

As the music played on, two lines of Sun Moon Sect people were seen coming up the peak pair by pair. Their eyes were dazzled seeing the sect's people wearing brand new dark green full-bodied gowns and white belts around their waists. The forty people in front were each carrying a tray with a satin cloth on top which held something. Unexpectedly, these forty people weren't carrying any sabre or sword on their waists. Once these forty people reached the peak, they stopped far away. They were followed by a group of two hundred people musicians who were also wearing full-bodied gowns and continuously playing their flutes. The ones coming up after them were trumpeters, drummers, big and small gongs, cymbals and bells, and all other types of musicians. Linghu Chong found this interesting and he thought, "When we fight, there'll be gongs and drums to accompany us. Isn't this just like fighting on a stage play?"

The music continued to play as groups after groups of Sun Moon Sect people came up. These people seemed to be arranged according to the halls they belonged to, with the different coloured gowns that they were wearing. Yellow gown, green gown, blue gown, black gown, white gown, each group was beautifully dressed like they were competing in a show. Their gowns were still new and each person was wearing a white belt tied to their waists. The people who had

come up to the peak numbered at around three to four thousands.

Chongxu thought, "They're not organised yet, we can take advantage of this and start killing them. This will be to our advantage. But they're playing trick, wanting to give propriety first before fighting. If we move now, we will be very rude." He then saw Linghu Chong was chuckling without care and Fangzheng was staring but not looking and maintaining his composure, he thought, "If I seem frightened, it's because my meditation isn't enough."

After the sect's people stood at their places, ten elders came up. With five to each side, they stood to the left and right. The music suddenly stopped and the ten elders said in unison, "Sun Moon Sect cultured and kind warrior, benefiting the common people, the Sacred Chief has arrived!"

A big blue sedan chair was carried up the peak. This sedan chair was being carried by sixteen porters, its movement fast and steady. The whole sedan chair looked like as if it was a master of qinggong as it floated up to the peak, and the sixteen porters carrying it didn't look weak in martial arts. Linghu Chong took a look and saw Zu Qianqiu, Huang Boliu, and Ji Wushi were among the porters. He was thinking if it wasn't for the fact that Old Man was too short then he would've been carrying the sedan chair with Zu Qianqiu and be one of the porters. Linghu Chong's anger surged up and he thought, "Zu Qianqiu is a hero from this generation, but Chief Ren forced him to do such a lowly thing. Treating the world's heroes like slaves, of course people will be angry."

There was a person on the left and right sides of the blue sedan chair. On the left side was Xiang Wentian, while on the right was an old man. This old man looked very familiar. Linghu Chong started as he recognised that person to be the elder who taught him how to play qin in Luoyang City, he was Elder Bamboo-Green. This person called Yingying as 'auntie', causing him to mistakenly take Yingying to be an old granny. After he left Luoyang, he hadn't seen him again,

but today he was following Ren Woxing up Xianxing Peak. His heart was thumping as he thought, "Why don't I see Yingying?" Suddenly he thought of something and saw the white belts tied around the Sun Moon Sect people like they were in mourning. Could Yingying have seen her father leading his men to attack Heng-Shan and after painstakingly admonished him not to do so, finally killed herself? Linghu Chong felt blood rushing up in his chest and his dantian felt painful. All he wanted to do right now was to rush forward and ask Xiang Wentian. But thinking of Ren Woxing inside the sedan chair, he stopped.

Even though there were thousands of people gathered on Xianxing Peak, there was no noise from the birds. That sedan chair finally stopped and everyone shot a look at it waiting for Ren Woxing to come out. All of a sudden they heard laughter coming from inside Wuse Convent. A person in a big voice said, "Quickly make way, give me a sit!" Another person said, "Don't fight, from biggest to smallest, we'll take turns in sitting on this nine dragons chair!" They were the Peachtree Flower Fairy's and Peachtree Branch Fairy's voices.

Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong were startled till their faces changed colour. They didn't know when the Peach Valley Six Fairies broke into Wuse Convent, and they were now fighting to sit on the nine dragon chair. If they sit for too long, the fuse would be triggered and wouldn't that be very bad? Chongxu quickly rushed into the convent.

"Quickly get up!" Chongxu shouted. "This precious chair belongs to Sun Moon Sect's Sacred Chief Ren! You can't sit on it!"

Peach Valley Six Fairies' voices bellowed out from inside the convent, "Why can't we sit on it? We want to sit!" "Quickly get up, let me sit!" "This chair is very comfortable, very soft, it's like sitting on a fatso's buttocks!" "You've sit on a fatso's buttocks before?"

Linghu Chong knew the Peach Valley Six Fairies were fighting to sit on the nine dragon precious chair. One sat for a



while, then another one would sit for a while. At the end, they would trigger the fuse and explode the tens of thousands cattles of explosives buried underneath Wuse Convent. Then the Sun Moon Sect people, Shaolin, Wudang, and Heng-Shan School heroes on the Xianxing Peak would all be burnt.

In the beginning, he wanted to rush inside to put a stop to them, but he didn't know how to do it and it seemed his heart was hoping that the explosives would explode. Since Yingying had died, he didn't want to live anymore. If everyone could die in a wink of an eye, how could it not be a clean death? With a glance, he suddenly saw Yilin's pair of smart eyes were looking at him. But as soon as their eyes connected, she immediately avoided her gaze. Linghu Chong thought, "Little martial sister Yilin is still so young, but she'll also be burnt to dust. Wouldn't that be a pity? But in this world, who doesn't die? Even if everyone today is being peaceful and has no enmity with each other, wouldn't everyone here still turn to bones a hundred years from now?"

Then he heard Peach Valley Six Fairies were still quarrelling continuously, "You've already sit twice, I haven't even sit once on it yet." "The first time I sat on it, I was pulled down so it doesn't count." "I have an idea, we'll all sit on it. See if it fits or not?" "Wonderful, wonderful! Crowd together, haha!" "You sit first!" "You sit first, I'll sit on top." "The oldest sit on the top, the youngest sit at the bottom!" "No, the oldest sit first! The younger you are, the higher you should sit!"

Great Master Fangzheng saw the crisis was going to happen soon, but he also couldn't say anything that would reveal the trap. He quickly walked inside the hall and loudly said, "Honourable guests are outside, don't quarrel, be quiet!" These two words 'be quiet' were said with the backing of Shaolin School's paramount internal energy martial art called 'Roar of the Iron Lion', and it was aimed at the Peach Valley Six Fairies. Priest Chongxu felt dizzy and was dangerously close to falling down. The Peach Valley Six

Fairies lost consciousness at the same time. Chongxu was happy and his hands moved like the wind to lift the two people sitting on the chair. This was followed by sealing the acupoints of those six people and throwing them beneath the Guanyin's offering table. He then stooped down besides the chair and heard no unusual noise. His hands and legs felt weak, and his head was perspiring heavily. If Fangzheng had come in just a bit later, then the fuse would've been triggered and everyone would have died.

Chongxu and Fangzheng walked back out shoulder to shoulder, and said, "Chief Ren, please come in for some tea!"

But the screen on that sedan chair remained motionless and there was no movement from inside the sedan chair as well. Chongxu was indignant as he thought, "This old demon head thinks himself so highly! Great Master Fangzheng, Headmaster Linghu, and I currently have the highest positions in Wulin. We're standing here waiting but you don't even pay attention to us!" If not for that nine dragon chair having a trap in it, he would have unsheathed his sword, opened up the sedan chair's curtain, and fought with Ren Woxing. He said it again one more time, but there was still no answer coming from inside the sedan chair.

Xiang Wentian bent his waist and put his ear beside the sedan chair. He nodded a few times listening to the directions from the person inside the sedan chair. Standing back up, he said, "My humble sect Chief Ren said, Shaolin Temple Great Master Fangzheng and Wudang Priest Chongxu are seniors in Wulin, and that he doesn't deserve for the two seniors to be waiting here for him. Later, he will personally go to Shaolin and Wudang to express his thanks and apology."

Xiang Wentian also said, "Chief Ren said he has come to Mount Heng-Shan today especially to meet Headmaster Linghu. He'd like to ask only Headmaster Linghu to be in the convent to meet him." When he finished speaking, he gestured with his hand and the sixteen porters carried the sedan chair into the convent and put it down inside the

Guanyin Hall. Xiang Wentian and Elder Bamboo Green accompanied the sedan chair inside, but they came back out with the porters, leaving the sedan chair alone inside the convent.

Chongxu thought, "Something's up here, I wonder what kind of trap is inside that sedan chair." He looked at Fangzheng and Linghu Chong. Fangzheng wasn't sure what to do and his face was looking bewildered.

"Since Chief Ren only wants to meet Junior alone, then please wait here," Linghu Chong said.

Chongxu whispered, "Be careful."

Linghu Chong nodded and strode inside the convent. That Wuse Convent was just a little room and if someone spoke loudly in the Guanyin Hall then people outside would be able to hear them clearly.

"Junior Linghu Chong pays my respect to Chief Ren," Linghu Chong greeted, but he didn't hear Ren Woxing saying anything. Linghu Chong suddenly gasped in surprise.

Chongxu was startled as he was afraid Linghu Chong had fallen under Ren Woxing's violent hands. He took a step wanting to enter the convent and help, but he thought, "Brother Linghu's sword art is excellent and unmatched in this world. He entered the convent with a sword so that demon head Ren couldn't have possibly killed him with a stab. If he had really fallen under his violent hands, I would still be too late coming in to help. If that old demon head Ren hasn't killed Brother Linghu, that'll be best. But if Brother Linghu has fallen under his violent hands, then this demon head will be alone inside the Guanyin Hall and he'll definitely sit on that nine dragon chair, and if I go inside then I'd ruin everything." In that moment, he felt agitated and pondered, "That old demon head Ren might be sitting on that chair right now. In just a moment, the fuse will be triggered and this Xianxing Peak will be destroyed. If I quickly run away at this time like a coward, Xiang Wentian will see it and will immediately alert him, then we'll be defeated. But if it

explodes now, no matter how fast I move, I still won't be able to escape. So what should I do?" He had originally calculated everything in detail. When the Sun Moon Sect came up the peak to attack, how they would fight, how to retreat, everything had been predicted that when Ren Woxing sit down on the nine dragons chair, everyone from Shaolin, Wudang, and Heng-Shan Schools would've retreated down to the valley. They never expected the Sun Moon Sect would come up without fighting and instead give their propriety first before fighting. Moreover, Ren Woxing wanted to meet Linghu Chong alone inside the convent. Everything that he had predicted had now changed. Even though he was very smart, he was at a lost for ideas at the moment.

Great Master Fangzheng also knew the situation was urgent, and he was also worried for Linghu Chong's safety. But his cultivation was already very deep and his mind was very clear. He felt life and death, glory and disgrace, bad and good luck, victory and defeat were not that big a thing. People strive to do things but whether it succeeds or not, it is all decided by heaven. Whatever the conclusion would be, it all depends on each person's fate and can't be forced.

That was why even though his heart didn't feel right, he looked indifferent. If the explosives really exploded and his bone was to turn to dust, only this leather sack would be lost, so what was there to be afraid of? The explosives buried underneath the nine dragons chair was a secret. Besides Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong, the people who buried the explosives like Qingxu and Chenggao were all at the waist of the mountain waiting for the explosives at the peak to explode before they explode the landmines. No one else on the Xianxing Peak knew of the situation. Shaolin, Wudang, and Heng-Shan Schools were all waiting for Ren Woxing and Linghu Chong inside Wuse Convent to finish speaking before they would move and fight against the people from the Sun Moon Sect.

Chongxu abided his time. He saw no movement inside the convent, and there was no noise coming out from there as well. Moving his internal energy, he tried listening to any noise. Indistinctly, he heard like Linghu Chong was whispering something. He felt happy and thought, "So Brother Linghu is safe and sound." As his mind was divided, his internal energy wasn't as pure anymore and he couldn't hear anything temporarily. But he was worried what he heard was just his own wishful thinking and that his ears had heard what he wanted to hear, and that the voice wasn't necessarily Linghu Chong's. Otherwise, why couldn't he hear what Linghu Chong was saying?

After some more time had passed, he heard Linghu Chong calling out, "Brother Xiang, please come in and accompany Chief Ren to exit the convent."

"Yes!" Xiang Wentian answered. With Elder Bamboo Green, they led the sixteens porters going into Wuse Convent and carried that blue sedan chair out of there. The Sun Moon Sect people standing outside the convent bowed, and said, "Respectfully welcoming the honourable Sacred Chief." That sedan chair was brought to its previous stopping place and was put down.

"Presenting Sacred Chief's gift to Shaolin Temple's Abbott," Xiang Wentian said.

Two men carrying trays walked up to Fangzheng, and bowed to him presenting the trays. Fangzheng saw the first tray contained a very old and fragrant strand of prayer beads, while the other tray contained a handwritten ancient scripture which had sanskrit written on the cover. The sanskrit written was 'Jingang Scripture'. Fangzheng couldn't help feeling rapt. In his research on Buddhism, there was more knowledge to gain from the 'Jingang Scripture'. The 'Jingang Scripture' he had studied was from the Eastern Jin where a reverend monk translated it into chinese. But there were some places in the scripture where it was difficult to understand and he had always wanted to see the original

sanskrit scripture to verify, but there was nowhere to find it. When he saw the scripture right now, he was enraptured. He joined his palms and said, "Amitufo, to receive this precious scripture, my appreciation is boundless!" He extended both of his hands respectfully and lifted that 'Jingang Scripture', then he lifted the prayer beads and said, "Thank you Chief Ren for your generous gift. I don't know how I can ever repay this."

"My humble sect's chief said that my humble sect has treated the world's heroes rudely," Xiang Wentian replied. "We are deeply ashamed of this. Great Master Fangzheng, don't add more blames on us and my humble sect will appreciate it very much." He leaned his head to a side and continued, "Presenting Chief Ren's gift to Wudang School's Headmaster Priest."

Two men from the sect acknowledged the order and walked up to Priest Chongxu. They bowed offering the trays. Those two people hadn't come close yet but Chongxu could already see one tray was holding a long sword. When those two people came near him, he saw the long sword's scabbard was multi-coloured greenish copper. On the copper was inlaid two characters: 'Zhen Wu'. Chongxu gasped in surprise. When Wudang School was first created by the Grandmaster Zhang Sanfeng, he was using a sword called 'Zhen Wu Sword' which had always been a treasure of the Wudang School. More than eighty years ago, a few elders from the Sun Moon Sect raided Mount Wudang at night and stole the precious sword along with Zhang Sanfeng's handwritten book of 'Taiji Manuscript'. Then a ferocious fight followed, in which three first class masters of Wudang died. Even though they also managed to kill four Sun Moon Sect elders, they couldn't snatch back the manuscript and sword. This was Wudang School's biggest shame, and over the last eighty years, before each headmaster passed away, their last instructions would be to snatch the sword and manuscript back. But Dark Wood Cliff was heavily fortified and Wudang

School had tried a few times to snatch them back, but they had always failed and had instead lost a few lives on top of Dark Wood Cliff. Unexpectedly, this sword had appeared on Xianxing Peak. When he took a look at the other tray, it contained a handwritten book with its pages turned yellow a long time ago. On the cover was written 'Taiji Manuscript'. Priest Chongxu had seen plenty of Zhang Sanfeng's handwritten book on Mount Wudang, so once he saw this 'Taiji Manuscript', he knew it was genuine.

Both his hands trembled as he took the long sword. His right hand gripped the handle of the sword and lightly drew it out halfway. He felt a rush of cold air coming from the sword. He knew Grandmaster Sanfeng had a godly sword art in his late years and he could easily not use a sword to fight, but if he was forced to fight with someone then he usually used an iron sword or a wooden sword. This 'Zhen Wu Sword' was the sword he used during his middle age to annihilate the demonical and shake the Jianghu. It was a very sharp instrument. Chongxu was afraid he might be fooled by Ren Woxing so he flipped open the 'Taiji Manuscript' to take a look. It really was Grandmaster Sanfeng's book. He returned the manuscript onto the tray and knelt on the ground, then he kowtowed eight times towards the manuscript and the sword.

Standing back up, he said, "Chief Ren has a very broad mind for returning the remnants of Wudang Grandmaster back to Zhen Wu Monastery. Even if my body is reduced to dust, it will be hard to repay your benevolence." Once he had taken the manuscript and sword, his heart was so excited that both his hands couldn't stop shaking.

"My humble sect's Chief said my humble sect had offended Wudang School in the past and we're very ashamed," Xiang Wentian said. "Today, everything is settled, and we hope that Wudang School will forgive us."

"Chief Ren is being too polite," Chongxu replied.

Xiang Wentian then said, "Presenting Sacred Chief's gift to Heng-Shan School's Headmaster Linghu."

Fangzheng and Chongxu both thought, "I wonder what he's going to give Headmaster Linghu. What kind of precious gifts are they going to be?" They now saw twenty men coming up, and each of them was carrying a tray as they walked up to Linghu Chong. On the trays were only gown, hat, shoes, wine pot, wine cup, tea cup, and many other everyday items. Even though each of them was fine, they were clearly not some magnificent items. Only one tray held a jade flute and another tray held an ancient qin, which were clearly treasures. But compared to the presents given to Fangzheng and Chongxu, they were not even close in value.

Linghu Chong folded his hands in salute and said, "Many thanks." He then ordered Yu Sao and the others to receive the gifts.

"My humble sect's Chief said that we've been inappropriate to come to Mount Heng-Shan this time and cause a big disturbance," Xiang Wentian said. "For all the Shi Tai from the Heng-Shan School, we're giving them each a set of gowns and a long sword. For all the secular martial sisters, we're giving them each a set of jewelries and a long sword. Please kindly accept them. My humble sect has also purchased five hundred acres of farm at the foot of Mount Heng-Shan to give to Wuse Convent. We'll take our leave now."

After he said this, he folded his hands in salute to Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong, then turned around to walk away.

"Mr. Xiang!" Chongxu called out.

Xiang Wentian turned around and said, smiling, "What's Priest's order?"

"We're indebted to your noble sect Chief's generosity and have received rewards without doing anything. So we don't feel comfortable," Chongxu said. "I don't know... don't know..." He just said these words when he couldn't say



anymore. He wanted to ask 'I don't know what's the idea behind this?', but at the end, he couldn't say it out loud.

Xiang Wentian laughed and folded his hands. "The items have returned to their original owners, this is naturally right. Why's Priest feeling uncomfortable about it?" He turned around and shouted, "Chief is going!"

The sound of music rose up and ten elders opened up the way, while the sixteen porters lifted the big blue sedan chair and started going down the peak. They were followed by the group of horn players and drum players. At the end of the line was the sect people from the different halls. They went down the peak in a line.

Chongxu and Fangzheng looked at Linghu Chong and both thought, "Why did Chief Ren change his mind? Only you know his reasons." They couldn't gather anything from looking at Linghu Chong, but he seemed to be happy and also a little sad. After they heard the Sun Moon Sect walking down for a while and the music sound had ceased, the cries of 'Long Live the Chief, Unify the Jianghu' had also stopped. With bluffs and bluster they came, and now everything was quiet.

Chongxu couldn't hold back any longer and he asked, "Brother Linghu, Chief Ren suddenly became generous, this must be because of your enormous reputation. I'm not sure... not sure..." He wanted to ask 'I'm not sure what you said', but he thought that if Linghu Chong was willing to say it then he'd of course tell them. But if he didn't want to say it, then asking too much would be inappropriate. That's why after saying 'not sure', he stopped himself.

"Please forgive me seniors," Linghu Chong replied. "Junior has promised Chief Ren. The reason for this is unsuitable to be let out for the moment, but there's no big secrets among the reasons. Seniors will know of the reasons yourself in days gone by."

Fangzheng laughed aloud and replied, "A big disaster has disappeared, this is really the good fortune of Wulin.

Looking at Chief Ren today, he doesn't have any enmity towards our orthodox sects and schools and has changed his murderous way. This is very encouraging and a happy moment."

Not knowing the reason made Chongxu's heart itched. Hearing what Fangzheng said, he also felt that it was reasonable. "I'm not being overly anxious, but Sun Moon Sect is very sly and crafty. We should still be very careful. Maybe Chief Ren found out that we're prepared and he's afraid of being blown up, so he pretended to be nice today. Then when we're not on our guard, he'd do a sneak attack. According to the two of you, can this happen?"

"This... person is hard to predict," Fangzheng hesitated. "We must be on our guard."

Linghu Chong shook his head. "No, it won't happen."

"Headmaster Linghu firmly believes this won't happen, that's very good then," Chongxu said, but he was actually thinking otherwise in his heart.

After some time, reports from below the mountain came. The Sun Moon Sect party had gone past the waist of the mountain, and the people guarding the road didn't receive the signal so they didn't fight or explode the landmines. Chongxu ordered someone to inform Qingxu, Chenggao, and the people responsible for the nine dragons chair and the landmines to cut the fuses.

Linghu Chong asked Fangzheng and Chongxu to enter Wuse Convent and rest inside Guanyin Hall. Fangzheng perused the sanskrit 'Jingang Manuscript'. Chongxu touched the 'Zhen Wu Sword' and studied the 'Taiji Manuscript', his joy was undescribably and gradually all his doubts and worries were forgotten.

All of a sudden, someone from underneath the offering table said, "Ah, Yingying, it's you!"

Another person said, "Brother Chong, You... you... you..." They were the voices of the Peach Valley Six Fairies.

Linghu Chong gasped in surprise and jumped up from his chair.

But then he heard voices kept coming from underneath the offering table, "Brother Chong, my dad, he's... he's passed away."

"What happened?"

"That day on Mount Huashan's Peak of the Morning Sun, not long after you went down the mountain, my dad suddenly fell down from the Deity's Palm. Brother Xiang and I caught him, not long after, he stopped breathing."

"Then... then... someone plotted against him!"

"No. Brother Xiang said, he's already old and had been suffering for many years under the West Lake. For the past few years, he had been completely engrossed in suppressing the various internal energies in his body, and it has actually taken a lot of energies out of him. This time, in order to destroy the five mountains sword schools, his mind has been occupied by this. His time is up."

"I never thought this would happen."

"That day on the Peak of the Morning Sun, Brother Xiang and ten elders discussed this and they unanimously elected me to be the Sun Moon Sect's Chief."

"So Chief Ren is actually Young lady Ren, not Mr. Ren."

Just then when the Peach Valley Six Fairies were fighting to sit on the nine dragons chair, Fangzheng used the 'Lion Roar' backed by unsurpassed internal energy to shake them up. Chongxu was afraid they might let out the secret so he sealed their acupoints and put them under the offering altar. Unexpectedly, these six people's inner energies were quite deep that they woke up not long after and heard the dialogue between Linghu Chong and 'Chief Ren'. Now, they had revealed the words that were supposed to be kept secret.

When Fangzheng and Chongxu heard Ren Woxing had died and Yingying had taken up the Chief position, they were startled but happy at the same time. Yingying had given both of them precious gifts but she had given Linghu Chong

some gown and shoes to wear, which were actually the wedding presents for their marriage. They still heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies talking one after another: "Brother Chong, I've come to Mount Heng-Shan today to see you. If the people from the orthodox path find out, they'll jest about it."

"Why's that important? You can only become bashful."

"No, I don't want others to know."

"Alright, I promise you not to say anything."

"I ordered them to called out those cultured and kind warrior, benefiting the common people, what long live the chief, unify the Jianghu, so other people wouldn't find out. I wasn't being rude to your Heng-Shan School and Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu."

"Don't worry about that, Great Master and Priest won't find out."

"Also, Sun Moon Sect and Heng-Shan School, Shaolin School, Wudang School are turning from enemies into friends. I also don't want others to say that it's my idea. In Jianghu, people will definitely say that it's because me... and you... and you is the reason, also the big fight was not fought, so I'll be really embarassed."

"Hehe, I'm not afraid."

"Your skin is thick, so of course you're not afraid. The news of dad passing away has been kept a secret by the Sun Moon Sect. Other people will only know my dad has come to Mount Heng-Shan and talked to you and reconciled with each other. This way my dad's reputation will be increased. When I get back to Dark Wood Cliff, I'll announce the death."

"Right, then as son-in-law I'll come to kowtow to him."

"You can come, that'll be best. That day at Mount Huashan on the Peak of the Morning Sun, my dad has personally agreed to our marriage, but... but after I agree....."

Linghu Chong heard the six of them were gradually revealing Yingying and his wedding arrangement so he

quickly shouted, "Peach Valley Six Fairies, you're still not coming out, talking nonsense under there. I'm going to peel your skin and strip your flesh."

But he still heard Peachtree Trunk Fairy sighed quietly and mimicking Yingying's speech, "But I'm still worried about you. Dad hasn't given you the method on how to harmonize the different internal energies. Actually, even if he had imparted it to you, it's no use. Dad himself, sigh!" Peachtree Trunk Fairy pinched his throat and he sounded grieved. When Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong heard him, they couldn't help becoming sad too. Ren Woxing was a strange warrior of this era, and even though he had done bad things all his life, it was still very sad for his life to have ended this way.

Linghu Chong's feelings towards Ren Woxing was particularly strange. Even though he detested the way Ren Woxing handled his power and his overbearing behaviour, he still couldn't help admiring his ability, especially his unscrupulous and independent nature which was quite like his own. The only difference was that he didn't have the ambition of 'unifying the Jianghu'.

At that moment, in the three people's hearts, they all thought, "From time past, all the emperors, ministers, warriors, even bandits and murderers, they all die at the end."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy squeezed his throat and said, "Brother Chong, I'm... "

Chongxu felt that if they continued to talk then Linghu Chong would be embarrassed. He laughed and said, "Peach Valley six brothers, sorry for the offence before. But enough with your talking, if you provoke Headmaster Linghu, he'll seal your 'lifelong mute acupoint'. I don't think it'll be worthwhile."

Peach Valley Six Fairies were greatly startled. They asked in unison, "What's a 'lifelong mute acupoint'?"

"Once that 'lifelong mute acupoint' is sealed, you'll be mute for the rest of your life and can't speak anymore," Chongxu answered. "But you'll still be able to eat and drink."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies shouted together, "Speaking is number one, eating and drinking are number two."

"The words you said just before, you mustn't say them again," Chongxu advised. "Headmaster Linghu, on accord of Great Master Fangzheng and I, please don't seal their 'lifelong mute acupoint'. Great Master Fangzheng and I will vouch for them. The conversation between you and Young lady Ren that the six of them eavesdropped from underneath the offering altar, they won't reveal a single word of it."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Injustice, injustice! We weren't eavesdropping, the sound entered our ears so what can we do?"

"You've already heard it, no one cares about anything else," Chongxu said. "But talking about it after hearing them, that you can't do."

Peach Valley Six Fairies said in unison, "Ok, ok! We won't say it, we won't say it."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "But Sun Moon Sect Sacred Chief, those two sentences that were changed, can we say it?"

"You can't say it, definitely not!" Linghu Chong shouted.

Peachtree Branch Fairy mumbled, "Can't say it then can't say it. Only you and young lady Ren can say it, we can't say it."

Chongxu pondered, "Two sentences that were changed by Sun Moon Sect? Those sentences must be 'Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu'. Young lady Ren is the chief now, and she doesn't want to unify Jianghu. But I wonder what they've been changed to?"

Three years later, at the Plum Manor on Mount Gu at the West Lake of Hangzhou, bright lanterns were hung and there was a gathering of beautifully dressed people. This day was the day Linghu Chong and Yingying were to be married. At

this time, Linghu Chong had already given the Heng-Shan School's headmaster position to Yiqing. Yiqing made every effort to give it to Yilin, saying Yilin had avenged Heng-Shan's big enmity. For avenging their masters, she should get the headmaster position. But Yilin said she would never agree and cried. When all is said and done, they followed Linghu Chong's idea and Yiqing was handed the headmaster position.

Yingying also resigned from being the Sun Moon Sect's chief and gave it to Xiang Wentian. Even though Xiang Wentian was a stubborn person, he didn't have any ambition to annex the orthodox sects. So over the last few years, Jianghu was peaceful.

Today, many Jianghu warriors had come to Plum Manor to congratulate them. After going through the ritual and finishing the banquet, it was time to have fun in the newlywed's house. The crowd wanted the bride and groom to perform a swordplay. In this world, everyone knew Linghu Chong's sword art was wonderful, and there were a lot of guests there who had not seen it yet.

Linghu Chong said, smiling, "Today, it'll ruin the atmosphere if we use sabres and swords. The bride and I will play a song, how about that?"

The crowd cheered.

Linghu Chong took a yaoqin and gave Yingying a jade flute. Yingying didn't lift her red cover, and extended her delicate hand to take the jade flute. She started playing a song with Linghu Chong. The tune they were playing was the 'Smiling Proud Wanderer'. In these three years, Linghu Chong was under Yingying's guidance in studying the qin and he was already quite good in playing this tune. Linghu Chong remembered of that day outside of Hengshan City out in the wilderness, he listened to Hengshan School Liu Zhengfeng and Sun Moon Sect elder Qu Yang playing this tune. The two of them were very friendly even though they were from different sects and both of them were finally killed. Today, he

himself had married Yingying and no sect could stop them. Compared to the people who composed this tune, he was more fortunate. He also thought when Liu and Qu composed this tune together, they must've been doing it because of their sects' separation and to erase the years of enmity between the sects. This time, the tune was being played by husband and wife, at last their wishes had been fulfilled. As he thought till here, the qin and flute became even more harmonious.

Most of the people in the crowd didn't understand music, but they were very pleased to hear it. When the song was finished, they all clapped and cheered, and happily led the married couple to the newlywed room. Once the couple were in the room, they closed the door to the room.

Suddenly, a sad huqin sound rose from outside the wall. Linghu Chong happily said, "Martial uncle Mo Da..."

"Don't make any noise," Yingying whispered.

They heard the huqin sound playing the tune 'Courtship<sup>13</sup>' softly, but the mournful air of the song could be felt from start to finish. Linghu Chong were feeling very happy as he thought, "Martial uncle Mo Da really didn't die. Today, he's come to play this tune to congratulate Yingying and I getting married."

The huqin sound gradually went far until finally it couldn't be heard anymore.

Linghu Chong turned around and gently lifted up Yingying's red face cover. Yingying smiled captivatingly, with the red candles shining on her face, she looked beautiful as jade. She suddenly shouted, "Come out!"

Linghu Chong was perplexed. He thought, "What come out?"

Yingying laughed and shouted, "Still not coming out, I'm going to drench you!"

From under the bed, six people came out. They were the Peach Valley Six Fairies. They were hiding underneath the bed to hear to the newlywed's conversation. Then they'd go



back to the hall and relate to the crowd what the newlyweds were talking about. Linghu Chong's mind was already drunk so he didn't realise anything. Yingying was still careful and she was able to hear their breathing under the bed.

Linghu Chong laughed aloud and said, "Six Peach brothers, I almost got trapped by your ambush!"

Peach Valley Six Fairies walked out of the room and started shouting, "Long Live, husband and wife forever! Long Live, husband and wife forever!"

Chongxu was at the Flower Hall chatting to Fangzheng. When he heard the cries of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, he couldn't help smiling. They had been keeping this a secret for three years and it was finally revealed now. This was the oath that Linghu Chong and Yingying had sworn to that day in the Guanyin Hall. The oath that came from changing the two sentences of the Sun Moon Sect.

Four months later, it was evening during springtime. Grass was long and flowers were blossoming. Linghu Chong and Yingying were newlyweds, holding hands as they went to Mount Huashan. Linghu Chong wanted to bring his wife pay his respect to Grand martial uncle Feng Qingyang, and to kowtow to him for teaching him the sword art. But they had been going around Mount Huashan's five peaks and three mountain ranges, searched every dell, but they didn't find a single trace of Feng Qingyang's track.

Linghu Chong was displeased.

"Grand martial uncle is a highly skillful person who's out of this world, like a divine dragon that we can only see its head but unable to see its tail, so we don't know where he's gone to," Yingying said.

Linghu Chong sighed. "Grand martial uncle definitely has a godly sword art. His internal energy cultivation can also be regarded as unmatched in this world. In the last three and a half years, I've been practising the inner energy he imparted to me. Those different types of energies are almost all gone."

"Then we can thank Shaolin Temple Great Master Fangzheng," Yingying replied. "Since we can't find Grand martial uncle Feng, we'll go to Shaolin Temple tomorrow and kowtow to Great Master Fangzheng to thank him."

"Great Master Fangzheng brought the divine martial art and guided me in learning it, so he's like a half master to me. We should give thanks to him."

Yingying pursed her lips smiling. "Brother Chong, you still don't understand. That skill you learned, it's Shaolin School's 'Tendon Altering Sutra' inner energy."

"Ah!" Linghu Chong gasped and jumped up. "It's... it's 'Tendon Altering Sutra'? How do you know?"

"That day I heard you said that the inner energy was given orally by Grand Martial uncle Feng to Peach Valley Six Fairies for them to bring to Great Master Fangzheng," Yingying explained. "I had my doubts on this. That internal energy method is so profound and mysterious that when you're practising it, nothing can go wrong in the slightest. If something goes wrong then you'll fire deviate and lose your life. How is it possible to ask the Peach Valley Six Fairies to bring this and pass it on orally? The Peach Valley Six Fairies speak in a tangle, and how can they also talk clearly? Even though Great Master Fangzheng said it and it's likely that grand martial uncle Feng forced them to memorise it, it's still very dangerous. Later on, I asked these six brothers and they all said it's true. But when I told them to recite a few sentences, one said they've forgotten it long ago, one said they can only tell Monk Fangzheng and can't tell other people. The six of them said a few more words, but their words don't match head to tail, and there were hundreds of discrepancies. Later, they revealed this by denying it, they said in order for Great Master Fangzheng to save your life, he didn't want you to know and pretended Grand martial uncle Feng was the one who imparted this martial art. If you ask them about it, he asked them to keep it a secret."

Linghu Chong's mouth gaped wide open and he didn't make any noise for a long time. Yingying continued, "But Grand martial uncle Feng calling them was true. But he called them to tell Great Master Fangzheng that the Sun Moon Sect was going to attack Heng-Shan, and he asked Shaolin and Wudang Schools to help."

"You're so bad," Linghu Chong complained. "You knew about this a long time ago but you only said about this today."

Yingying smiled. "That day in Shaolin Temple, you were very stubborn. Great Master Fangzheng wanted you to join Shaolin and make him your master, then he'd impart you with the 'Tendon Altering Sutra', but you said you wouldn't agree. You brushed him away and walked out the door. If Great Master Fangzheng again mentioned this matter of imparting you with 'Tendon Altering Sutra', then he's afraid your old stubbornness would come out again, rather dying than learning it. Wouldn't that be a waste? That's why he was forced to use Grand martial uncle Feng's name to make you think it was Huashan School's inner energy method, and you'd learn it willingly."

"Ah," Linghu Chong understood now. "I know, you didn't want to tell me this because you're also afraid I'll become stubborn and suddenly stop learning it? Since now you know the various inner energies in my body are almost gone, you told me everything."

Yingying again pursed her lips smiling. "Your stubbornness, everyone knows it mustn't be provoked."

Linghu Chong let out a long sigh and pulled on her hand. "Yingying, back then you gave up your life at Shaolin Temple so Great Master Fangzheng would impart me with 'Tendon Altering Sutra'. Even though you didn't die, Great Master Fangzheng had already agreed to you to do this. He's a senior in Wulin and his words carry a lot of weight, so finally he gave me this divine martial art. This was the martial art that you used your life to trade with, even if I don't care

whether I live or die, how can I... how can I not care about you and stop practising?"

Yingying whispered, "I also thought of this before, but I was still afraid."

"We'll go down the mountain tomorrow and go to Shaolin Temple. Since I've already learned the 'Tendon Altering Sutra', it's best if I go to Shaolin Temple and become a monk."

Yingying knew he was joking. "A wild monk like you, the big temples won't accept and the little temples don't want you. Shaolin Temple's rules and commandments are very strict, a monk who drinks wine and eats meat like you, they'll drive out of there within half a day."

They walked hand in hand, chatting leisurely. Linghu Chong saw Yingying was continuously looking left and right, looking like she was looking for something.

"What are you looking for?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Not telling, you'll know when we find it. This time coming to Mount Huashan, we didn't manage to pay our respects to grand martial uncle Feng and it's a regret. But if we also can't see that person, it'll be a pity."

Linghu Chong was confused. "We're seeing another person? Who is it?"

Yingying smiled and didn't answer. She said, "You locked Lin Pingzhi up in that jail underneath Plum Manor. It's actually a brilliant idea. You promised your little martial sister to take care of Lin Pingzhi for the rest of his life. While he's inside that jail, he has food to eat, clothes to wear, and no one can harm him. It's really looking after him for the rest of his life. I've also given your other friend a special treatment."

Linghu Chong was even more perplexed, he thought, "My other friend? Who's he?" He knew his wife's behaviour was often outside people's expectation. Since she wasn't willing to say it then there was no use asking. That night, they stayed in Linghu Chong's old room and drank wine. Even though Linghu Chong was looking at his lovable wife, he still

thought of many past events and couldn't help feeling sad. After drinking more than ten cups of wine, he was rather intoxicated. Yingying suddenly looked happy and put down the wine cup. She whispered, "I think he's coming, let's have a look."

Linghu Chong heard sound of monkey's cries coming from the mountain in front. He didn't know who Yingying was talking about but he followed her out of the room.

Yingying followed the monkey's cry and walked quickly towards the mountainside in front. Linghu Chong followed behind her. Under the moonlight, he saw seven to eight monkeys gathered. There were a lot of monkeys on Mount Huashan. Linghu Chong didn't know what was going on but surprisingly he saw a person surrounded by those monkeys. Squinting his eyes, he saw that person was Lao Denuo. Delight and anger mixed together inside him, he turned around wanting to take a sword from inside the room. Yingying pulled his arm and whispered, "We'll go closer and see clearer."

They went a hundred feet closer and saw Lao Denuo was held between two enormous monkeys, and was being dragged around here and there by them. He wasn't in control of his body at all. The martial art he had learned was all useless to resist against these two big monkeys.

Linghu Chong was perplexed. "What happened to him?"

"Have a look, I'll tell you slowly," said a smiling Yingying.

The monkeys were impatient, jumping up and down, and there wasn't a moment of respite at all. Lao Denuo was being pulled to the left and right, and he occasionally let out a roar which prompted the two monkeys to scratch his face. At this time, Linghu Chong had finally understood what was going on. Lao Denuo's right hand and right side were linked to the monkey on the left, while his left hand and left side were linked to the monkey on the right. It was obvious he had been shackled with iron manacles.

He had understood most of it as he asked, "You did this?"

"What do you think?" Yingying asked.

"You destroyed Lao Denuo's martial art?"

"No, he did it himself to atone for his sin."

When the monkeys heard the sound of people speaking, they became noisy and took Lao Denuo away with them to go back into the mountain. Linghu Chong wanted to kill Lao Denuo in the beginning to take revenge for Lu Dayou, but seeing him suffering so much, to behead him with a sword was natural, but his heart felt it would be too fast. So he thought, "This traitor has been very sly and his evil is much higher than martial brother Lin. I should let him suffer more." Then he said, "So these last few days, you've been looking for him to give me a look."

"That day when my father came to the Peak of the Morning Sun, that bastard came offering his flattery. He said he'd obtained the sword manual for the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', and that he'd come to present it to daddy. Dad asked him what for and he said he wanted to become one of the elders for the Sun Moon Sect. Dad didn't have any free time to talk to him so he told someone to look after him. Later, dad passed away and everyone was busy so no one cared about him and we just took him to the Dark Wood Cliff. After around ten days, I thought about this again and told him to come to ask him some questions. I found out he learned the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' himself and accidentally crippled his martial art instead. This person is your sixth martial brother's murderer, and since your sixth martial brother loved monkeys, I told people to find two big monkeys and lock him up with them and set him free on Mount Huashan."

When she said till there, she gripped Linghu Chong's wrist and continued, "Never thought that I, Ren Yingying, would also finally be locked up with a big monkey, and never part ever again." She smiled tenderly, her smile soft and loving.

The End

# Notes

[[←1](#)]

In the third edition, the castration part was not mentioned to Linghu Chong and Yingying anymore. This is to fix the later chapters when Linghu Chong and Yingying somehow forget about this.

[←2]

Emperors in ancient times prayed to the heaven and earth when they took up their thrones also



[←3]

Here's the definition of calyx: the whorl of sepals of a flower collectively forming the outer floral envelope or layer of the perianth enclosing and supporting the developing bud; usually green.

[←4]

Daizong is the old name of Mount Taishan

[←5]

Three legged cat is phrase that means a person who can do many things but specializes in nothing.

[←6]

To call someone 'lang' has romantic connotation.

[←7]

Se is similar to zither. Se has 25 strings while zither has 7 strings.

[←8]

This means clearly admitting that the sword manual is there.

[ ←9]

Linfengyi is some kind of transit depot for exchanging horses

[←10]

'The mantis seizing the cicada not knowing the oriole was just behind'  
means 'to covet gains ahead without knowing the danger behind'



[←11]

Yihe - 'he' means peace

[←12]

Suona is a Chinese wind instrument.

[←13]

The Chinese characters literally mean 'Male Phoenix seeking female Phoenix'.